FAMILY VALUES

POWER TO THE PEOPLE - STICK IT TO THE MAN

VIGGO MORTENSEN IS

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC

THIS JULY

EXT. CASCADE MOUNTAIN RANGE. WASHINGTON STATE. DAWN

In the early morning dawn, the Skykomish River in Washington State's Cascade Mountain Range pounds against the granite river rocks.

Giant Fir branches in the lush forest undulate, almost dancing in the soft wind.

A BLACK-TAILED BUCK makes its way through the dense woods.

The deer walks to the bank, dips its mouth into the river, and drinks.

Tall grass parts and out of the morning fog comes a young man, completely COVERED IN MUD, a massive, serrated hunting knife in his hands.

This is BODEVAN. He's 18, with wispy hair down to his shoulders.

The deer turns its head, sensing something.

Bo freezes — perfectly camouflaged in the tall grass.

The deer sniffs the air, but as Bo is covered in mud and animal skins, it smells nothing. It relaxes, drinking from the river again.

Bo exhales, silently.

In a flash, Bo leaps out of the grass and in one continuous motion, tackles the deer and slices the animal's carotid artery. The deer does nothing more than flinch, blood spurts from it's neck and it just folds, hemorrhagic shock taking over.

It's a perfect kill.

Bo watches and the animal takes its final breath.

Then he signals and five KIDS glide into the clearing. They range in age from 14 to 6, all have long, unruly hair, dirty faces, and wear, over the usual kid's clothes of t-shirts and jeans, what looks like animal skins. They are: two twin 15year old girls, KIELYR and VESPYR; RELLIAN, a boy of 13; ZAJA, a 8-year old girl; and lastly, NAI, a 6-year old boy.

The other kids surround Bo, staring down at the fallen deer.

Like some primordial warrior, his upper body camouflaged by mud, BEN CASH rises out of the grass. He's 45 and has a formidable beard, but his body is lithe and muscular, fit like a man half his age.

Ben plunges his finger in the deer's throat. He paints a stripe of blood across Bo's face.

BEN: Today. The boy is dead. And in his place. Is a man.

Everyone pauses for the deep solemnity of the moment.

Bo slits open the animal; its innards spill onto the earth.

Ben raises his hands high in the air and — as if he's saying a prayer — closes his eyes.

The IMAGE FREEZES — as the title comes up around him:

CAPTAIN FANTASTIC

EXT. FOREST. MORNING

Trailed by the rest of the family, Ben and Bo carry the deer — legs tied to a tree limb — through the thick forest.

EXT. TIPI. MORNING

While Ben and Bo attach the deer's feet to rope, swing the rope over a tree, and string it high off the ground, we get our first glimpse of their "home."

In a clearing, hidden under a canopy of enormous Douglas Fir trees, next to a small greenhouse garden — a large Tipi sits behind a fire pit.

A few of the kids jump on small wooden platforms, grab hanging rope, and pull themselves up on these little "elevators." Cascading high into the trees above the Tipi is a kid's paradise of funky tree houses, zip lines, rope bridges, hammocks, and observation platforms.

Rellian strums on a guitar. He sings "Little Red Corvette" by Prince.

BEN: Training in one hour!

Ben watches as, in front of their Tipi, strung from a rope on a tree, the twins skin the deer that Bo shot: peeling off its hide with none of the squeamishness of 15-year olds and all the skill of experienced butchers.

Behind them, 12-year old Rellian, with a flint that he extracts from a pouch on his belt, makes a fire in a large pit in front of the Tipi.

VESPYR: Dad. Where's the boning knife? Zaja.

Ben nods.

EXT. TREE HOUSE. DAY

Ben climbs up a wood ladder, ducking intricately woven branches to enter what looks like a massive bird's nest.

Zaja sits on the floor, cleaning the skeleton of a small animal with a 6-inch boning knife.

Inside, the tree house has been turned into some kind of grotesque Death Shrine. It's plastered with actual animal skeletons, magazine photographs of dead bodies from the Holocaust, and pictures of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. From the look on Ben's face, this is the first time he's seen Zaja's interior design.

BEN: Jesus.

Zaja looks at the photo on the wall. She shakes her head no.

ZAJA: Pol Pot.

Ben puts out his hand and Zaja passes him the boning knife.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MEADOW. MORNING

In a mountain meadow, Ben and the kids, their eyes closed, sit cross-legged in a circle.

Silence.

Apart from the rustle of the leaves as the wind blows through the trees, the occasional chirping of distant birds.

Ben opens his eyes and says, "Okay."

All the children jump up, wooden sticks in their hands, and Ben teaches them what looks like commando knife-fighting.

This is not a suburban mall karate class.

Bo slashes at Ben with his stick. In one swift movement, Ben deflects with his forearm and hip-throws Bo. Bo hits the ground hard, Ben's stick already pressing into Bo's throat. A kill strike, shocking in its sudden violence.

The others watch, taking all of this utterly seriously, then break into pairs and practice the move.

Rellian glares at his father, but makes no move to join.

Ben watches Kielyr and Vespyr. They're attacking and defending like it's a choreographed dance.

> BEN: If you don't stab to kill. Really stab. For the liver. Or the kidneys. She'll never learn.
>
> ZAJA: Shouldn't we aim here? A knife in the lungs creates pneumothorax. Or next to the sternum, to penetrate the heart? That would be instant death.

Ben looks over at his 8-year old, standing next to Nai.

> BEN: If it makes you happy, Zaj. Sure. Aim for the heart.

Vespyr eyes her sister, but is still hesitating.

> BEN: The stick will break before it hurts her.

Vespyr attacks again, but this time she overcompensates, Kielyr's parry is ineffectual, and Vespyr's stick hits her sister in the stomach. The stick breaks and Kielyr YELPS in pain.

> BEN: Good.
>
> KIELYR: What?! How is that good? She stabbed me! She fucking stabbed me!
>
> BEN: Then you better learn to defend yourself.

Ben hands Vespyr another stick.

EXT. TIPI. NIGHT

Flames illuminate the faces of the family, as they eat roast venison, sitting on the ground in a circle around the fire.

By the light of candles and kerosene lamps, the kids are all reading books way beyond their years: Nai is reading the Encyclopedia Brittanica, he's on letter "J"; Kielyr is reading "Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human

Societies" by Jared Diamond; Rellian reads Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov;" Bo is reading a college Calculus textbook.

BEN: Zaj. Page.

Zaja holds "Middlemarch" by George Eliot. She glances at the page number.

ZAJA: 398.

Ben records this in a notebook.

BEN: You still liking it?

Zaja nods.

BEN: I thought you would. To stay on schedule for the test you need to be finished in 8 days. Vesp?

Vespyr holds "The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality" by Brian Greene.

VESPYR: Just finished Chapter 12, "The World on a String."

Ben looks up at her.

VESPYR: What.

BEN: Are you having trouble with quantum entanglement?

VESPYR: No.

BEN: Planck length vs. Planck time?

VESPYR: I'm fine.

BEN: Good, then tomorrow you can give a little presentation on M-Theory, argue counter-points with Bo and Rell vis-a-vis Witten and Dirac.

Vespyr makes a face at Kielyr. Neither sees that Ben catches the look.

Ben puts down his notebook. He watches the children reading for a moment.

Then he picks up his guitar. Improvises a rhythmic strum. Punctuates it with little, abrupt vocalizations. So funky one can't help but be drawn in.

The kids ignore him, but gradually, one at a time, each of them pick up a different musical instrument — a flute, drums, a trombone, a violin — and joins him.

Soon, everyone is up on their feet. Dancing and singing and playing their instruments — illuminated by the light of the fire — grooving to their improvised song and having a blast.

EXT. FOREST. MORNING

Leaping over stumps, ducking under branches, Ben and the kids race through the forest.

EXT. SHED. DAY

From out of his workshop shed, Ben carries some handmade wooden birdhouses, helped by Bo and Vespyr.

EXT./INT. FOREST/STEVE. DAY

Ben and the kids walk toward a a beat-up, 36-foot long blue 1989 Thomas Saf-T-Liner school bus, parked on a forest path.

BEN: Try not to kill each other before we get back.

KIELYR: If training is over today, can we take Steve somewhere for class time later?

NAI: Why don't we have a Mommy?

This catches the attention of all the kids. They all stop and look at Ben.

BEN: You do have a Mommy.

VESPYR: You said she would only be gone for a week.

BEN: It hasn't been very long.

KIELYR: It's been three months, two weeks, six days, and eleven hours.

BODEVAN: Mom is very ill.

KIELYR: Don't talk to us like we're your inferiors.

BODEVAN: Who knew there were so many geniuses in the world.

VESPYR: Dad, Bo is being sarcastic.

BEN: That was sardonic. Sarcastic would be...

"Your genius is blinding." They're both mocking, but sarcastic is directed at a person and meant to hurt. Sardonic is less direct and is said more for laughs or for wit. Grab the end.

VESPYR: We DO know about Mom.

BODEVAN: You think you do, but you have no concept of the scope or the depth of her illness.

KIELYR: Dad, Bo is being condescending.

BEN: Bo's right. Mom has to be in a hospital now.

VESPYR: But you said hospitals are only a great place to go to if you're a healthy person and you want to die.

ZAJA: You said Americans are undereducated and overmedicated.

KIELYR: You said that the AMA are avaricious whores only too willing to spread their fat legs for Big Pharma.

BEN: Not enough of the neurotransmitter serotonin to conduct electrical signals in Mom's brain. A lack of receptor sites. Acute tryptophan depletion. We don't know exactly what it is. Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors — Celexa, Lexapro, Paxil, Zoloft — or Selective Norepinephrine

Reuptake Inhibitors — Cymbalta, Effexor, Pristiq — it's simply the most effective way to manage it.

RELLIAN: Exactly when is Mom coming back?

BEN: That's what I'm going to find out.

Ben, Bo, Vespyr, and Kielyr climb on the bus and we see that the interior has been customized, the rows of seats removed and replaced with a full library, a closet full of clothes, desks, maps on the walls, loft beds in the back. Ben closes the doors and, on the outside of the glass door panels is a spray-painted, stenciled word: "Steve."

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD. DAY

Steve the Bus winds down through the mountains.

INT. DENTIST'S WAITING ROOM. DAY

Bo, Vespyr, and Kielyr sit in a dentist's waiting room, marvelling at the synthetic, brightly-colored office. Peppy MUZAK plays as Ben approaches the desk.

BEN: We have an appointment. Vespyr and Kielyr Cash. My daughters. They're 15. It's time they see a dentist.

The RECEPTIONIST stares at him. She checks the appointment book.

EXT. SMALL TOWN STORE. DAY

Bo and Ben are unloading their handmade wooden birdhouses in front of a store. A group of TEENAGE GIRLS walk out and one of them smiles at Bo.

TEENAGE GIRL: You comin' in?

Bo shrugs, avoiding her eyes.

TEENAGE GIRL: Yes? No? Okay. 'Bye.

Bo turns red and just nods.

As the girls walk away, the one who held the door for Bo looks back at him, then says something to her friends, who all check Bo out and giggle.

BEN: Go talk to her.

BODEVAN: Ask her what she thinks about the working people creating an armed revolution against the exploiting classes and their state structures?

BEN: Marxists can be just as genocidal as... No. Just... I don't know. Talk about —

BODEVAN: Whether or not she's a Dialectical Materialist and accords primacy to the class struggle?

BEN: Avoid... Marxism. Or telling her you're a Trotskyite.

BODEVAN: "Trotskyist." Only a Stalinist would call a Trotskyist a "Trotskyite." And I'm not a Trotskyist anymore. I'm a Maoist.

Ben nods. He hands Bo a key and Bo walks away.

The STORE OWNER comes out and hands Ben a wad of cash.

STORE OWNER: Sold all the stuff from last time. You said you'd be back months ago.

INT. POST OFFICE. DAY

Bo opens a large post office box. Inside, the box is packed with mail. There are the new issues of "Scientific American," "National Geographic," "The New Yorker," and "The Economist."

And then a stack of large envelopes.

Bo looks at the first one. It's marked, "PRINCETON UNIVERSITY."

INT. POST OFFICE. DAY

In another corner of the post office, Bo holds up a piece of paper.

It reads, "We are pleased to welcome you to Harvard University, the class of 2015."

He looks at the other envelopes, all now opened, spread on the counter before him. They are from Dartmouth, Brown, M.I.T., Yale, and Stanford.

On top of the opened envelopes are welcome letters from every university.

EXT. SMALL TOWN BAR. DAY

In the front of the bar, Ben dials a number on the house phone. We don't see who he's talking to (but will come to realize that it's HARPER, his sister).

HARPER: Ben?

Immediately, from the tone of Harper's voice, Ben can tell something is very wrong.

BEN: What is it?

Silence.

BEN: Harper.

Ben hears a sharp, irregular exhalation of breath. Whatever is wrong is serious enough to be very difficult to say.

BEN: Tell me.

HARPER: Leslie killed herself last night.

The blood drains from Ben's face. He is frozen for a moment. No reaction whatsoever.

BEN: How?

Another pause.

BEN: Harper, tell me.

HARPER: She jumped out of a window.

Now Ben swallows. But nothing else. No emotion whatsoever. He nods.

HARPER: Ben?

Ben hangs up the phone.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

Ben drives in silence. He looks in the rearview mirror, at Bo, Vespyr, and Kielyr. They stare out the window, completely unaware of his recent phone call.

INT. TIPI. NIGHT

Illuminated by candles and kerosine lamps, all the kids sit together, dressed for bed, staring expectantly at their father.

Ben takes a deep breath.

BEN: Last night. Mommy killed herself. She jumped out of a window. Your mother is dead.

As the reality of Ben's words hit them, utter devastation passes over the children's face. And then, in a matter of seconds, they all burst into tears, snot comes out of their noses, tears roll down their faces, some of them are almost hyperventilating. Grieving openly and deeply, it's like something out of Greek Tragedy. Elemental. Primal.

ZAJA: What's going to happen to us?

BEN: Nothing is going to change. We'll continue living exactly the same way. We're a family.

Rellian stands. He yells. Savage, guttural shouts. They're fierce and pained, like a trapped animal.

RELLIAN: Mom! Mom!

He picks up a knife, but just paces, red-faced, not knowing what to do with it.

Bodevan moves to stop his brother, but Ben holds Bo's shoulder.

Rellian takes the knife and stabs, over and over again, into the side of a cabinet. Harder and harder.

RELLIAN: Fuck you! Fuck you! Mom! Mom! Fuck you, Mom, you fucking...!

Rellian drops the knife and runs out of the Tipi.

INT. TIPI. NIGHT

LESLIE's face. Smiling. Giggling.

She is leaning over, swaying back and forth, dragging her long auburn hair across Ben's face.

She dips down and kisses him. Over and over again. She's laughing.

She SPEAKS, but NO SOUND comes out of her mouth.

INT. TIPI. NIGHT

Ben opens his eyes. He sits up and blinks, peering into the darkness of the Tipi. The kids are asleep.

Leslie is not there.

He lights a candle and opens a dresser. Under his clothes, he withdraws a hidden manila folder. One file is marked WILL AND TESTAMENT. He rifles through the papers until he finds what he's looking for. He reads. His face turns white.

BEN: Jesus fucking Christ.

EXT. TIPI. DAWN

Ben stands outside the Tipi. He brings his bagpipes to his lips and blows.

Out comes that eerie and persistent WAIL.

EXT. FOREST. MORNING

Ben bolts through a dense rainforest — creating an obstacle course as he goes — dodging trees, bounding over rocks and fallen logs.

Straggling behind, the kids all follow his exact movements.

He reaches a meadow, stops, and clicks his stopwatch as each kid passes him. First comes Bo.

BEN: 1:05. Worse than yesterday!

Then the twins.

BEN: 1:11. I'm embarrassed for you.

Then Rell.

BEN: 1:18. You're plateauing. You're going back to eccentric contractions and leg cycling.

Then Zaja and Nai pass him.

BEN: 1:26 and... 1:29. Fine if you both were THREE! Subpar! This is subpar! No rest!

Ben dodges back the woods and the kids follow.

EXT. MEADOW. MORNING

In a meadow, Ben leads everyone through a complicated series of calisthenics: jump squats into burpies into holding plank. This is hard-core functional training and the kids move through the exercises like athletes.

BEN: The Rule of Three. Nai.

NAI: You can survive 3 minutes without air.

BEN: Zaj.

ZAJA: You can survive 3 hours without shelter.

The kids are in plank, holding themselves in a push-up position only by their elbows.

BEN: Kielyr.

KIELYR: 3 days without water.

BEN: Vesp.

VESPYR: 3 weeks without food.

BODEVAN: Dad.

BEN: Hold it.

BODEVAN: Dad.

BEN: Keep holding. Rell.

The kids are now really struggling, sweating, their small bodies quivering with effort.

RELLIAN: 3 years without human companionship.

BODEVAN: DAD! When's Mom's funeral?!

Ben finally turns to look at his son.

EXT. SMALL TOWN BAR. DAY

Ben is again on the bar's house phone, now talking to Leslie's father, JACK.

JACK: The utter recklessness, the instability and insecurity that you have brought to her life —

BEN: WE decided to live here. BOTH of us. This was a mutual decision.

JACK: This is YOUR goddamned fault!

BEN: Leslie had a disease. She needed to be in a good facility, you'll only pay if she's treated near you, fine. We did that. Listen. I found her Will. I assume you know that Leslie was a Buddhist.

There is a long pause on the line.

JACK: Leslie was a nudist?

BEN: Buddhist. Leslie was a BUDDHIST. She wanted to be cremated. Not buried. It was very important to her that —

JACK: I have just lost my only child. I'm in no mood to discuss the particulars of her funeral.

BEN: There's more. Look, this is... strange, I admit, but in her Will, Leslie clearly stipulated that —

JACK: I rue the day she met you. Wherever you are, you stay there.

BEN: Jack.

JACK: I miss my grandchildren, but you are not welcome here. Is that clear? You show up. I will have you arrested.

The phone goes silent.

BEN: Can we just speak civilly? Hello?

ABIGAIL, Leslie's mother, now speaks.

ABIGAIL: Leslie is in Heaven now. She is finally at peace.

BEN: When's the ceremony?

ABIGAIL: In five days. Here in Albuquerque. At our church. How're the children?

BEN: They're... in shock.

ABIGAIL: It's been years.

BEN: Did you hear what Jack just said?

ABIGAIL: I miss them. The children.

BEN: Jack just said he'll have us arrested if we come. Did you hear that?

ABIGAIL: He's very upset. I'm sorry. It's best to do what he says.

There's a CLICK and a DIAL TONE as she hangs up the phone.

EXT. TIPI. EVENING

While Ben cooks venison over a large fire, the kids, all deep in their private thoughts, stare into the flames.

Nai exits the Tipi. He's completely naked.

BODEVAN: Mom hated that world.

BEN: Clothes when we eat.

Nai disappears back into the Tipi.

VESPYR: We're in the very unique position of hating those people.

BEN: Can "unique" be modified?

All the other kids respond with a "no."

Nai comes out of the Tipi wearing a beat-up Whale costume.

NAI: We don't hate Nana and Grandpa, but the rest of her tribe are fascist capitalists.

KIELYR: You're just repeating whatever Dad says.

NAI: I'm writing down everything you say. In my mind.

KIELYR: You don't even know what a fascist is.

NAI: Violent nationalist militants, supported by big business and they're totalitarian single-party dictators.

Kielyr pauses for a second, surprised by the accuracy of Nai's description.

VESPYR: We're her family. We have to go.

KIELYR: Grandpa said we can't.

Ben takes venison off the fire and cuts it into small pieces.

KIELYR: What will happen if they arrest you? Will they take us away from you?

At this, all the kids turn to look at Ben.

BEN: There is that possibility.

Zaja comes out from the greenhouse.

ZAJA: Dad. I think Rellian ran away again.

EXT. FOREST. EVENING

Ben walks silently through the forest.

He finds Rellian sitting on a rock by an old tree. Rellian doesn't turn to look at his father.

RELLIAN: How'd you find me so quickly?

Ben points to the earth, Rellian's shoe prints in the dirt.

BEN: You don't want to be followed, you should take off your shoes.

Rell is silent.

BEN: Mom's illness had nothing to do with you guys. It was chemical. She loved you very much. None of this is your fault. But I can't help you. Unless you talk to me.

RELLIAN: All we do is fucking talk! Why won't you let us see Mom?

BEN: Come here, buddy.

Rellian bolts up and dodges Ben.

RELLIAN: I hate my fucking shit-ass life!

Rell storms back in the direction of the Tipi and Ben follows.

INT. TIPI. MORNING

Ben awakes and climbs down the ladder to the floor of the Tipi.

The children are gone, their beds empty.

EXT. TIPI MORNING

Ben opens the Tipi to see his kids, like they're on a train platform waiting to depart, all standing out in front of the Tipi; they've got old suitcases and duffel bags, packed and ready.

NAI: We want to see Mom.

ZAJA: I want to give a speech. Tell Mommy that I love her. For the last time ever.

VESPYR: We want to honor her life.

Without saying a word, Ben immediately carries their luggage back to the Tipi.

KIELYR: We're her family. We have to go. We need a ritual. To heal.

VESPYR: For the grieving process.

ZAJA: Plus Grandpa can't oppress us.

RELLIAN: It's the least you can do.

Ben stops. He looks at Rellian.

BEN: What does that mean?

RELLIAN: You know.

BEN: No. I don't.

RELLIAN: Forget it. But I know.

VESPYR: We're strong. We're ready.

KIELYR: We are defined by our actions, not by our words.

At this, Ben smiles.

NAI: That's your favorite sentence. In English.

His arms loaded with their belongings, Ben opens the Tipi and disappears inside.

INT. TIPI. MORNING

Ben is unpacking one of the kid's suitcases, shoving clothes back into a chest of drawers.

NAI: If we're defined by our actions. Then we have to go.

RELLIAN: New business!

BEN: Point of order.

RELLIAN: My name is Rellian. I move to make an amendment.

BEN: The Chair recognizes the assembly.

RELLIAN: New business. The assembly wishes to attend our mother's funeral. I move to vote.

BEN: Is there a second?

NAI: Seconded.

BEN: Is there a discussion?

All the kids shake their head no.

BEN: All in favor of voting to attend your mother's funeral please signify by saying "aye."

All the kids say, "Aye."

BEN: All opposed please signify by saying "nay."

Silence.

BEN: Nay.

Ben stares at his kids. More silence.

BODEVAN: Dad. Majority.

VESPYR: KIELYR Give us the Mission! The Mission!

ZAJA: We want the Mission!

NAI: "Mission: Rescue Mom!"

Ben stares at his kids. He shakes his head no.

EXT. GRANITE ROCK. DAY

Ben leads the kids as they climb up the face of a vertical granite formation. They all wear climbing harnesses, carabiners around their belts, and are tied onto the bright orange climbing rope, following Ben as he makes his way up the face. It's an expert grade and they're all struggling.

Without warning, Rellian slips — plummeting at least ten feet — falling hard. The rope catches and he swings, spiraling into the granite face. He smashes his hand against the rock, but finally manages to steady himself, grabbing hold of the face with his other hand.

RELLIAN: Fuck!

Rellian is shaking, trying to catch his breath. He looks down. Hundreds of feet below are a cluster of massive rocks.

ZAJA: If you hit the rocks below you, you'll die from blunt force trauma. Or internal bleeding from massive bone fracturing or splenic flexure of the large intestine.

BEN: Yes, thank you, Zaj.

RELLIAN: My hand.

Ben stares down at Rell.

BEN: You're alive.

Rellian stares at his hand. No bones are sticking out, but it's throbbing.

BEN: S.T.O.P. Stay calm. Think. Observe. Plan.

Rell looks around; there doesn't seem to be anywhere to grab. He stretches out his leg, but the one edge he sees is too far to reach.

RELLIAN: It's too far.

BEN: Know that you can make it and you will.

RELLIAN: I can't. My hand.

The other kids wait, looking up at Ben for guidance. Ben doesn't move.

BEN: There is no cavalry. No one will magically appear to save you in the end.

Rellian grits his teeth. He stretches out his leg again. But he's losing balance. Right before he slips, he pushes off with his other foot and swings, just managing to land on the far edge that seemed too far. As soon as he lands, he swings and leaps again, finding a hand hold with his good hand. He looks up at his dad and nods.

Ben smiles.

Then continues to climb.

EXT. GRANITE ROCK. DAY

The rain is now POUNDING as Ben bandages Rellian's hand.

Rell flexes his fingers. He grimaces and without looking at his father, plops down on a rock, joining his brothers and sisters.

For a long time, Ben watches his kids.

They all just stare at the ground. Clothes soaked. Exhausted. Depleted. Emotionally numb.

BEN: Class time. We're going up to the glacier.

Without a word of protestation, they drag themselves up and trudge toward the bus.

EXT. CASCADE MOUNTAINS. DAY

Steve the Bus is high in the Cascade Mountains, winding down a country highway.

INT. STEVE. DAY

Ben glances into the rear-view mirror. All the kids look absolutely despondent. Listless and lost. Staring out the window. Or at nothing.

Ben slams on the breaks. He stares at a sign: an arrow points to the right and an arrow points to the left. He grabs the PA radio and flips the switch.

> BEN: We can't go to Mommy's funeral. We have to do what we're told. Some fights, you can't win. The powerful control the lives of the powerless. This is how the world works. It's unjust and unfair. But too bad. We just have to shut up and accept it.

Ben looks back at the kids. They look devastated.

> BEN: Well, FUCK THAT.

Ben hit's the cassette player, and cranks up "Immigrant Song" by Led Zeppelin. He turns back toward the kids and yells over the music.

> BEN: So they know we're FUCKING COMING!

All the kids stand and yell in excitement.

Ben peels out and jerks the wheel to the right, swerving — in the middle of the empty country highway.

EXT. COUNTRY HIGHWAY. DAY

On a country highway, Steve the Bus slowly winds its way down the snow-peaked Cascade Mountain range.

INT./EXT. STEVE — MOVING/STOPPED. COUNTRY HIGHWAY. DAY

There's nothing but thick forests of Douglas Fir and Spruce, as far as the eye can see. From the back of the bus, Zaja stands.

> ZAJA: Road kill! Dad! Stop Steve!

Ben slowly pulls the bus over and Zaja jumps out.

INT. STEVE — STOPPED. COUNTRY HIGHWAY. DAY

Ben opens the doors and Zaja climbs back on the bus. She opens a towel and shows her dad what she found: a smashed squirrel, stiff with rigor mortis. She looks elated.

ZAJA: And I don't have one like this!

Ben tries to smile.

EXT. HIGHWAY I5. PORTLAND, OREGON. DAY

Steve the Bus, now on Highway I5, passes Portland, Oregon. Snow-capped Mount Hood appears in the distance.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

Now past the city and into the Cascade Mountains south of Portland. Kielyr looks up from her book.

KIELYR: What's a "bordello?"

Ben looks over to see Kielyr reading "Lolita," by Vladimir Nabokov.

BEN: A whorehouse.

KIELYR: Oh.

BEN: I didn't assign that book.

KIELYR: I'm skipping ahead.

BEN: And?

KIELYR: It's interesting.

BODEVAN: Illegal word!

ZAJA & NAI: Dad! Kielyr said Dad! She said "interesting!" "interesting!"

BEN: "Interesting" is a non-word. You know you're never allowed to use it. Be specific.

KIELYR: It's... disturbing.

BEN: More specific.

KIELYR: Can I just read?!

BEN: After you give us your analysis.

KIELYR: There's this old man. Who loves this girl. But she's only —

BEN: That's the plot.

Kielyr pauses, considering how to articulate her feelings about the book.

KIELYR: Because it's written from his perspective, you sort of understand and sympathize with him. Which is amazing. Because essentially, he's a child molester. But his love for her is beautiful. But it's also kind of a trick, because it's so wrong. He's old and he basically rapes her. So it makes me feel... I hate him and I feel sorry for him. At the same time.

Ben smiles.

BEN: Well done.

Kielyr rolls her eyes and goes back to her book.

NAI: What does "rape" mean?

BEN: When one person, usually a man, forces another person, usually a woman, to have sexual intercourse.

NAI: Oh.

BEN: Who's hungry?

All the kids say, "Me!"

NAI: What's sexual intercourse?

BEN: When a man sticks his penis in a woman's vagina. Anyone spot any animals yet?

This baffles the 6-year old Nai.

NAI: Why would a man stick his penis in a woman's vagina?

BEN: Because it gives them both pleasure. And the combination of a man's sperm and a woman's egg creates a baby and continues the human race.

NAI: But that's where she pees.

BEN: Pee comes not from the vagina, but from the urethra, which is within the outer labia. But yes, generally speaking. That is where she pees.

This seems to further confuse Nai.

NAI: I'm sad.

BEN: So am I. So is everyone. Everyone! Keep an eye open for game of any kind.

INT. STEVE — STOPPED. NIGHT

Somewhere south of Eugene, Oregon, Steve is parked just off the highway, hidden in the brush.

Ben watches his children sleep.

INT. BANK. MORNING

A BANK TELLER counts some bills in front of Ben, who's now dressed in a vintage suit. Ben looks over at his kids, all waiting patiently on a bench.

They are all dressed in second-hand clothes. The boys in suits, the girls in dresses and frilly shirts.

Ben takes the bills and joins the others, but everyone is frozen, just staring at the other BANK CUSTOMERS.

BEN: Now what?

Zaja looks deeply disturbed.

ZAJA: What's wrong with everyone?

BEN: What do you mean?

KIELYR: Are they sick?

BEN: Who?

NAI: Everyone is so fat.

Ben looks around the bank. His kids are right. The other customers, without exception, are all overweight.

BEN: Yes, they are.

NAI: Fat like hippos.

ZAJA: That's not nice to say.

NAI: But look.

KIELYR: You can think it, but we don't make fun of people, right Dad?

BEN: That's right. We don't make fun of people.

VESPYR: Except Christians.

ZAJA: Yeah, we don't make fun of people. Except Christians.

BEN: We really shouldn't make fun of them either. Although it's hard not to.

Come on.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

On the edge of town, heading back toward the freeway — the FLASHING LIGHTS of a police car behind them.

KIELYR: Dad?

The SWIRLING POLICE LIGHTS visibly alarm the kids.

NAI: Are they going to stop us from rescuing Mom?

Ben pulls Steve over. He looks back at his kids.

BEN: This. Right now. This is your first real test. Be calm. Remember your training.

EXT./INT. STEVE — STOPPED. DAY

Ben opens the doors and OFFICER HAYES peeks in.

BEN: Afternoon, Officer.

OFFICER HAYES: License and registration, please.

Ben reaches into the glove compartment and pulls out his papers.

OFFICER HAYES: You know why I pulled you over?

BEN: No, sir.

OFFICER HAYES: Your left rear brake light is out. I'm going to check the computer.

Officer Hayes looks around the bus. The interior of Steve is clean and organized and he sees nothing suspicious.

But then he looks at the children. He stares at them long enough to make Ben nervous.

OFFICER HAYES: No school today?

Bo stands and addresses the officer.

BODEVAN: Man, by his sin, has become separated from God, and only through personally accepting the gift of reconciliation purchased by Jesus at the cross can he regain his fellowship with God.

Nai jumps out of his seat.

NAI: Jesus is the way, the truth, and the light!

The officer stares at the kids.

BODEVAN: We're home-schooled. (to Ben) Father? May I?

Ben looks at Bo. He has no idea what Bo's doing.

BEN: You may.

Bo signals for the other children and takes Officer Hayes by the hand.
All the children hold hands and begin singing the Christian hymnal, "One Day When Heaven Was Filled With His Praises."
As they sing, Officer Hayes — with every line — grows visibly uncomfortable.

ALL THE KIDS SINGING: "Jesus came forth to be born of a virgin! Dwelt among men, my example is He! Living, He loved me!"

OFFICER HAYES: I should probably —

ALL THE KIDS SINGING: "Dying, He saved me! Buried, He carried my sins far away! Rising, He justified freely forever! One day, He's coming! O glorious day!"

Officer Hayes hands Ben his papers back.

OFFICER HAYES: Look, sorry — I got to get back to work here. Get that light replaced soon as you can, okay?

BEN: Sure thing officer. Sorry about that.

After Officer Hayes leaves, Bo looks at his dad.

BODEVAN: Power to the people.

BEN: Stick it to the man.

EXT. OREGON HIGHWAY. DAY

On a hill, Kielyr moves silently through tall grass, a bow and arrow in her hand.
She peers over a ridge. Down below is a flock of sheep, grazing.
Ben appears silently behind her.

KIELYR: They're just standing there.

Now crawling, she moves closer to the grazing sheep and raises her bow.
She aims, holding a sheep in her sights. So long that her pull arm trembles.
Then she lowers her bow. She can't do it.
Nai runs up the ridge.

NAI: Dad! DAD!

EXT. HILL. DAY

Ben, followed by the other kids, runs down the hill to see:
Rellian, the flint still in his hand, has set a fire in the brush.
Ben rushes over and stamps it out with his feet.

BEN: Why would you do that?

Rellian glares at him.

BEN: You could have set this whole hill on fire.

Rellian says nothing. He turns, trudging down the hill and towards the bus.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

For a moment, they drive in silence. Then Kielyr bursts into tears. The kids all look distraught.

NAI: I miss Mom.

VESPYR: Mankas al mi Panjo.

KIELYR: Mi deziras ke Panjo povus reveni hejmen guste nun.

BEN: No! No Esperanto. I am not joking.

KIELYR: Domage.

BEN: No foreign language unless the language is spoken by all. You know the rule.

VESPYR: Jes, domage.

BEN (in German): You can speak German.

KIELYR: Ni rajtas paroli en kiu ajn lingvo kiun ni volas.

BEN (in Mandarin): Or Mandarin.

VESPYR: Ne gravas.

BEN: NO ESPERANTO!

VESPYR: Ne estas nia kulpo ke vi ne povas paroli Esperanton.

The kids all look deeply unhappy.

NAI: I'm hungry.

BEN: Then maybe one of you should have shot the fucking sheep.

INT. HIGHWAY DINER. DAY

They all sit at a table in a highway diner, examining menus. The place is half-empty, but there are some ELDERLY PEOPLE and a couple of TRUCK DRIVERS.

BEN: How many people in here?

The kids scan the diner.

VESPYR: Dek.

BEN: English.

Vespyr holds up both her hands: 10.

NAI: No, 11.

BEN: How many exits and where?

KIELYR: Versajne unu en la necesejo malantau la kuirejo.

ZAJA: She forgot that one. 10 o'clock, left of the bathroom.

BEN: Tell me why this matters. In English. Or no food.

Kielyr looks at Vespyr.

KIELYR: Never be caught unaware.

BEN: More specific.

VESPYR: Have a plan for every situation. And every possible contingency. Before it's too late.

BEN: Good.

The kids examine the menu.

BODEVAN: They have hotdogs.

ZAJA: What's a Coke?

BEN: Poison water.

KIELYR: Can I have the grilled-cheese?

BEN: No.

NAI: What's a... milk shake?

VESPYR: Can I have a hamburger and fries?

BEN: I'm going to pretend that you never asked that question.

ZAJA: Can I have pancakes?

BEN: Okay, everyone up. We're going.

BODEVAN: What? No. Why?

Ben holds up the menu.

BEN: Because there is no actual FOOD on this menu!

He walks toward the exit and the kids follow him out.

INT. SUPERMARKET. DAY

Ben pushes a shopping cart through a vast, crowded, supermarket. He places an enormous cake in his cart.

He passes Bo. They don't acknowledge each other.

Ben turns the corner and passes Kielyr and Vespyr. Again, they don't look at each other.

Ben now passes Rellian, pushing a shopping cart. Inside, sitting around some food, is Zaja.

Ben spots a large display of soup cans, stacked high into a massive pyramid display. He examines the ingredients of one of the cans.

BEN: Oh, God.

He grabs his chest and careens around the supermarket aisle, slamming into the shelves, knocking food onto the floor. He fumbles with a bottle of medicine. He manages to open it, but is trembling so violently that he only ends up spilling the pills all over the floor.

A few PATRONS rush over to see what's happening.

BEN: My pills! My...

And then he collapses to the floor.

Someone yells, "Call 911!"

The patrons are now joined by THREE SUPERMARKET EMPLOYEES. They try to help Ben, but he is flopping around on the floor too violently for them to get a hold on him.

Nai runs up.

NAI: He can choke!

Nai pushes his way in and shoves Ben onto his side, manipulating him into a fetal position.

NAI: Everyone get back! Just get back!

QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS:

- Bodevan, pushing a cart full of food, charges through the door of the supermarket and races through the parking lot.
- Kielyr and Vespyr, their backpacks stuffed with food, are led out of the opposite side of the market by an ELDERLY COUPLE.
- Rellian and Zaja stop at the cash registers.

RELLIAN: An old man is having a heart attack! Call 911! CALL 911!

The last supermarket EMPLOYEE abandons his register and runs toward the commotion.

Rellian and Zaja unfold some paper bags, load up their groceries, and walk slowly and calmly out into the parking lot.

INT. SUPERMARKET. DAY

A crowd of employees and patrons surround Ben and Nai. They watch as Ben's fierce trembling subsides.

NAI: He's okay now.

Slowly, Ben's eyes seem to focus. He sits up. Breathes in and out.

BEN: Okay. Sorry. Okay. I'm okay.

As Ben leans back against an aisle, Nai gathers the spilled pills and puts them back into the bottle.

EXT. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT. DAY

Nai escorts Ben, wearing his backpack, through the parking lot.

BEN: Sorry about the fuss.

The SUPERMARKET MANAGER follows them, nodding.

MANAGER: Sure we can't get you an ambulance or anything?

BEN: No, no. Just forgot to take my pills. I'm fine now. Really.

EXT./INT. STEVE — MOVING. SUPERMARKET PARKING LOT. DAY

Ben pulls Steve out of the parking lot.

As soon as they're clear of the supermarket parking lot, he flips a switch and Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower" — here sung by Jimi Hendrix — BLASTS throughout the bus.

The kids bounce hard into each other, shouting and laughing and dancing.

EXT. HIGHWAY. DAY

Now in Southern Oregon, Steve comes down the Siskiyou Mountains.

EXT. ROADSIDE CAMP. DAY

The bus is parked off the freeway. Ben and the kids sit on the ground in front of a fire, eating food from the grocery bags.

BEN: What else?

BODEVAN: Flawed exit strategy. Everyone went out the same doors. No one utilized the loading dock area at all. If it got blocked, we'd all be trapped.

VESPYR: Inadequately planned extraction point. We probably shouldn't have all gone directly to the bus.

KIELYR: Predetermined pickups would have been much less risky.

BEN: And I would be remiss if I didn't single out Kielyr and Vesp for praise here. Improvising on the spot, having an elderly couple escort them out, that provided additional cover and showed on-the-fly analytical thinking beyond their 15-years.

NAI: "Mission: Free the Food!"

BEN: Your mission, you want to start?

Bodevan pulls a package out of a bag.

BODEVAN: 8 packets of Salmon jerky. Mainly protein and healthy fats, including Omega 3s.

KIELYR: One pound dried organic apricots. Beta-carotene.

BEN: Why?

KIELYR: Your body converts it into vitamin- A. Plus it prevents free radicals.

Bo continues to pull food out of various bags.

VESPYR: Tomatoes for lycopene, one of the strongest carotenoids;

VESPYR: spinach for lutein and zeaxanthin, again carotenoids; lentils for isoflavones, fiber and protein; peanut butter for good fat, skim milk for vitamin-A, B, and D and for calcium; and lastly watercress and arugula for penethyl isothiocyanate, believed to arrest the development of cancer cells.

Ben nods.

BEN: "Mission: Heart Attack."

Accomplished. Nai. Open my bag.
Nai reaches into his father's bag and pulls out a cake.
The kids stare, frozen.

NAI: What is THAT doing here?

Ben takes out a can of CoolWhip and covers the cake.

BEN: Happy Noam Chomsky Day.

ZAJA: It's today?!

KIELYR: Today is Noam Chomsky Day?!

VESPYR: But Noam was born on Dec. 7th.

BEN: Well. We're celebrating it today.

Ben cuts the cake and as soon as he passes them a piece, the kids practically inhale it.

INT. STEVE. DAY

From the floorboards, Ben flips open a trapdoor — revealing a large storage area. He grabs a poster board of Noam Chomsky and a pile of wrapped presents.

EXT. ROADSIDE CAMP. DAY

Everyone, apart from Rellian, sings the family's version of the "Happy Birthday Song." "Noam! Uncle Noam! Today! The day of your birth, all hail!" as Bo and Ben hand out presents.

The kids rip at the wrapping paper. Bo pulls out an exquisite recurve hunting bow with inlays of various woods.

BEN: It's a 55-pound pull. Laminated wood and glass. Silent and fast.

As Bo tests the pull, the twin girls and Zaja unwrap massive knives, as long as their forearms.

KIELYR & VESPYR: A new knife! So beautiful!

ZAJA: KA-BAR: fighting knife! Thanks, dad!

BEN: 7 inch blade, partially serrated. Handle's slip resistant. Good balance if you dip down when you cut.

Nai's present is an old, 1970s copy of "The Joy of Sex." He flips through it, eyes wide.

BEN: Pictures.

Nai stares at a drawing. He looks horrified.

Rellian opens his present: it's a new recurve like Bo's and a quiver of arrows. But he just puts them on the table and sits, staring at his shoes.

BEN: Those are Black Storm Broadheads. Razor sharp.

RELLIAN: What kind of crazy person celebrates Noam Chomsky's BIRTHDAY like it's some kind of official holiday?! Why can't we just celebrate Christmas like the entire world?!

BEN: You would prefer to celebrate a magical fictitious elf instead of a living humanitarian who has done so much to further human rights and understanding?

Rell just stares at his dad.

BEN: Let's have a discourse.

RELLIAN: Forget it.

BEN: No. Explain. Take the opportunity provided to make your case. We are all open to hearing your arguments.

If they're valid, if you persuade us, I'm absolutely open to changing.

RELLIAN: No, it's great. Yea, Noam Chomsky Day!

Rell stomps toward the bus.

Nai opens another present. It's the same knife Ben gave to the twins. Now Nai's face lights up.

NAI: Yes! Thanks, dad.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

Little Nai runs up and hugs his father.
Now back on the road, Bo stands and approaches Ben.

BODEVAN: I want to go to college.

Ben laughs.

BODEVAN: We're not all going to just live with you forever.

This stops Ben. He stares at his son.

BEN: I have to think about it.

BODEVEN: There's nothing to think about.

BEN: You're too young.

BODEVAN: You said my training was done.

BEN: It is.

BODEVAN: So let me go.

Ben stares at Bo for a moment. He shakes his head no.
Bo slams his fist into a seat and stomps back to his sleeping loft.

EXT. HIGHWAY. DAY

As Steve travels along, the rural communities of Northern California slowly transform into suburbia.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA. DAY

Steve now drives through the outskirts of Sacramento, California, and into rush hour. Ben picks up the PA radio.

BEN: Today's Great Human Being is a man named Enrique Peñalosa, the Major of Bogatá, Columbia from 1998 to 2001. Peñalosa completely re-envisioned the idea of "city;" beautiful, functional public space designed to promote daily human interaction among people of all incomes and races. He massively restricted cars, created vast acres of bikes lanes and green spaces, emphasizing the happiness and safety of children.

BEN: What we have HERE is an example of Calvin Coolidge's "The business of America is business." ExxonMobil, Chevron and ConocoPhillips

collectively made $58.3 BILLION last year. Instead of spending our money on health care, education, infrastructure, we shall pray at the altar of Saudi Princes, we enter — for oil — unwinnable foreign wars, spend your tax dollars on the occupation of foreign countries, create more enemies who want to kill us. Good American men and women die every day. Our democracy is one of the brightest lights of social justice in the history of humankind. But hear freedom ring! Let's go shopping! We can drive to the Mall!

NAI: What about Prince?

BEN: Different one.

The kids stare out the window, amazed at the endless miles of cars.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD. EVENING

Steve winds through tree-lined, middle-class neighborhoods. Most of the homes are new and have grass lawns out front.

The bus stops in front of a two-story house.

INT. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT

JUSTIN, Harper's 15-year old son, sits in front of his computer. He wears over-sized skater clothes and has a shaved head. He shows Rellian how to play Grand Theft Auto 5.

Rellian is in heaven.

Over the SOUNDS of EXPLOSIONS and GUNFIRE and SCREAMS, Bo, Kielyr, Vespyr, and Zaja just sit on Jackson's bed, trying to make sense of this alien environment.

The walls are plastered with band and movie posters. People they don't recognize and movies they've never seen or heard of.

INT. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Nai is alone in the living room, staring at a framed photograph on the wall.

The photograph is of Ben and Leslie, taken at their wedding. She wears a white dress and pushes cake into Ben's mouth.

JACKSON: Life's a bitch.

Nai turns to see JACKSON, Harper's 13-year old son. He is dressed in the same over-sized skater clothes as his brother and has the same shaved head.

NAI: Yeah.

JACKSON: Then you die.

Nai nods.

JACKSON: Life fucking sucks, man.

Nai has no answer for this. He bites his lip.

HARPER: Dinner! Everyone!

JACKSON: Dude.

Jackson just nods his head over and over. Then he spots the knife on Nai's belt.

JACKSON: Whoa! Can I check that out?

Nai hands Jackson his new knife. Jackson swings it around.

JACKSON: Rad.

Harper comes into the room.

HARPER: Boys, dinner!

Her face drains of blood when she sees the knife. She rushes over and yanks the knife away from Jackson.

HARPER: Ben! Ben!!

Ben runs in.

BEN: What? What?!

Harper holds out the knife.

HARPER: What is this?

BEN: Jesus, you scared me. It's okay. It's Nai's.

HARPER: This is Nai's? Nai is 6.

BEN: He is.

HARPER: Do I really have to say this out loud? Why does a 6-year old have a real sword?

BEN: It's not a sword. It's a knife.

HARPER: Why does a 6-year old have a knife... this BIG?!

BEN: It's primarily for butchering meat, but you can use it for making skins, creating shelters. It has many uses.

Harper stares at her brother for a minute. Then she shakes her head, resigned disappointment on her face.

HARPER: I'm putting this in the knife drawer. He can have it back when you leave.

INT. DINING ROOM. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT

The dining room is nothing especially elegant, but compared to what Ben's kids are used to, this is very formal.

Napkins are lined up at every seat and glasses and silverware set out.

Harper and Dave are placing food on the table: roasted chicken, mashed potatoes, and salad.

HARPER: Jackson! Now!

Jackson sulks in. His face is buried in his Nintendo DS.

HARPER: Not at the table.

Jackson plops down and continues to play.

HARPER: Jackson.

JACKSON: Alright!

Once everyone sits, they pass the food around and Dave holds up the wine bottle for Ben.

BEN: Please.

HARPER: Everything is local and organic and non-GMO. I'm just saying.

Ben smiles and Dave passes Ben the wine bottle. Ben pours himself a glass.

BEN: Bo, little Syrah?

Bodevan nods and Ben pours his 18-year old son some wine.
Justin and Jackson freeze, wide-eyed.

HARPER: Ben.

BEN: It's one of the great pleasures in life, it's not crack.

ZAJA: What's crack?

BEN: A crystallized, highly addictive form of the stimulant cocaine. Accelerated the decimation of urban inner-city neighborhoods in the mid1980s. Crack-heads, some of them just kids, were killing each other for their Nikes.

Harper smiles. Weakly.

HARPER: Children do not drink wine.

BEN: In France, children drink wine all the time. It's a digestive.

HARPER: Well, we're not in France.

Ben smiles. He puts the wine glass down.

NAI: They killed each other for Nike? The Greek winged Goddess of Victory?

At this, Justin and Jackson laugh.

JACKSON: He's joking, right?

They can see, by their cousin's faces, that he is not.

JUSTIN: They're like Adidas. But cooler.

ZAJA: Who's Adidas?

Justin and Jackson cannot believe their ears.

JACKSON: You're serious?

Zaja nods.

JUSTIN: They're shoes.

Everyone is silent for a moment. Harper and Dave share a look.

DAVE: Ben. We're... I'm so sorry for your loss.

BEN: Thanks, Dave.

DAVE: I don't... really know what else to say.

Dave looks at Harper for help.

BEN: It's okay. I know you had issues with Leslie. It's not a secret.

DAVE: I wouldn't say that!

BEN: Last time we saw you, you called her a "fucking bitch."

HARPER: Ben!

BEN: It's okay. The kids know. Right guys?

All of his kids nod, completely unaffected by it.
Justin and Jackson look absolutely stunned.

DAVE: No, wait. I said... we all had a huge fight about sugar... I gave the kids Frosted Mini-Wheats! The extremity of her position... She was YELLING at me, she PUSHED me, and I said —

BEN: "Don't be such a fucking bitch."

HARPER: Ben!

DAVE: That kind of language is inappropriate in front —

BEN: They're just words. YOUR words. But just words.

HARPER: Not spoken in this household.

BEN: Absolutely. Understood.

There is another protracted and awkward silence. Dave looks very concerned.

DAVE: My point was... it's not easy to express... to try and articulate... When someone dies...

Dave gives up. He sighs.

DAVE: We're all... devastated. We're just... so sorry.

Ben nods.

BEN: None of us grew up with a ritual that helps us deal with the confusion and sorrow that comes with death.

JUSTIN: Dad, how did Aunt Leslie die?

Dave looks at Ben. Then back at his son.

DAVE: Well. Aunt Leslie was sick. And she had some... complications. From her sickness.

BEN: She had a mental illness called Bipolar Affective Disorder. We think it first started after Bo was born, the genesis of which was probably a form of postpartum psychosis.

BEN: Her moods would swing radically from "mania," she would be elated, have so many plans and ideas for the future, to severe depression, where she'd be almost catatonic, utterly without hope. We weren't really able to diagnose the —

HARPER: I'm not sure the kids need to know all the details. Dave tries to take over.

DAVE: The doctors put her in the hospital. They gave her medicine. But she was... really sick. And she... died. Sick people die. Sometimes. They die. And she... she just... died. Died of... Because she was sick. She died.

His children look at him, confused by the inadequacy of his explanation.

DAVE: These things can be very difficult to explain.

BEN: She jumped out a window. She killed herself.

HARPER: Ben!

BEN: My kids know.

Harper bursts into tears and runs from the room. Dave pauses. Then he stands.

DAVE: Excuse me.

Dave follows Harper.
As soon as he's gone, Ben pours wine into each of his kid's glasses. Then he holds up his wine glass.

BEN: To Mom.

All the kids say "to Mom," clink their glasses, and drink.
Ben looks at Justin and Jackson, holding a finger to his lips.

BEN: Shhhhhh.

EXT. YARD. HARPER'S HOUSE. NIGHT

On the back lawn behind Harper's house, Ben drops some duffel bags; he checks and re-checks supplies.

HARPER: We do the best we can! That's all everyone's doing. The best they know how! I'm sorry it does not meet your high standards!

DAVE: This is a very hard time right now, we're all still probably in shock. Everyone's very... raw.

BEN: I was simply telling them the truth.

HARPER: Protecting children from certain concepts that they're too young to comprehend is not lying to them!

DAVE: Guys. Let's keep our voices down here.

Ben looks at his sister.

BEN: I apologize. I'm sorry for not respecting the way you do things in your home.

HARPER: Okay. Thank you for saying that.

Harper wipes the tears from her eyes. Her tension decreases, her voice now tender and sympathetic.

HARPER: I know Leslie's been sick for years. But I can only imagine how difficult this time must be for you.

Ben's kids come out of the house; they find and climbs into their sleeping bags.

DAVE: No, hey. What're you doing?

BEN: We're sleeping under the stars.

HARPER: We made up the rec room downstairs.

DAVE: Who wants to sleep on Toy Story sheets?

None of the kids have any idea what Harper and Dave are talking about, but the idea of sleeping inside is obviously attractive.

BODEVAN: Can we?

NAI: Can we, Dad?

Ben ignores the hopeful faces of his kids.

BEN: We're fine here.

Harper and Dave look at the kids. They are plainly not fine with this decision.

INT. KITCHEN. HARPER'S HOUSE. MORNING

It's the morning chaos in every house with kids and parents who work. Harper simultaneously clears the breakfast dishes and, at the same time, is packing up lunch for Justin and Jackson.

HARPER: We're going to fly in Sunday morning. We can only stay until after the ceremony because the kids have school on Monday.

Jackson is playing his Nintendo DS under the table.

HARPER: Jackson.

JACKSON: Can I be excused?

HARPER: "May I..." No, you may not. Put that away or I'm going to break it in half and throw it in the trash can.

JACKSON: Alright!

HARPER: Actually, you may be excused on one condition. Please show your cousins your new hamster.

JUSTIN: Can we play Xbox after?

Harper looks at Dave.

HARPER: One game.

JUSTIN: JACKSON Yes! Yes!

All the kids jump up and follow Justin and Jackson into the adjacent room. VIDEO GAME SOUNDS start almost immediately.

Dave and Harper exchange a look. Dave nods.

DAVE: How are the kids?

BEN: They're fine. They're strong.

Ben clears the table and starts washing the dishes.

DAVE: How long have you been there?

Wherever it is you're living now.

BEN: We left Boulder when Bo was about 3. Lived on that farm we had in Oregon until he was 7. No, 8.

BEN: I guess we've only been in the forest for... about 10 years.

DAVE: How do you still have money?

Ben smiles.

BEN: I buy only what I need.

DAVE: But how do you —

HARPER: You want to live in the trees, fine, that's entirely up to you. But your children are without a mother now. What you do will have a lasting impact on their entire lives.

BEN: And that. That is precisely WHY I am doing what I am doing.

DAVE: We're really — may I?

Harper nods.

DAVE: Harper and I have been talking... The kids need stability. Structure. Like normal kids. They need to go to a real school. So they can get real jobs when they're —

HARPER: Oh, for Christ's sake.

Harper just can't take it anymore. She jumps up.

HARPER: You're going to get them killed! You have any idea what you're doing to them?

BEN: Saving their lives is what I'm doing.

HARPER: Oh, don't be ridiculous.

Is knowing how to set a bone or treat a severe burn ridiculous? Is knowing how to navigate by the stars in total darkness ridiculous? How to identify edible plants, how to make clothes from animal skins, how to survive in the forest with nothing but a knife?

Harper looks ashen.

HARPER: Jesus.

BEN: They have the cardiovascular and muscular endurance levels of elite athletes.

HARPER: They're children! They need to go to school and learn about the world!

BEN: Jackson! Justin! Come here a second.

After a moment, Jackson and Justin peek in.

JACKSON: What?

BEN: How old are you now, Jackson?

JACKSON: 13.

BEN: Can you tell me, what's the Bill of Rights?

Jackson shrugs.

JACKSON: What something costs?

BEN: Justin, you're 15, right? What is that, ninth grade?

JUSTIN: Yeah.

That's High School now? You like your school?
Justin shrugs.

BEN: Can you tell me what the Bill of Rights is?

JUSTIN: A government thing. Like rights that people have and stuff. In America.

BEN: Could you be more specific?

Justin shrugs again.

BEN: Zaja! Come here please!

Ben turns to Harper and Dave.

BEN: Zaja just turned 8, by the way.

Zaja walks in.

BEN: The Bill of Rights.

ZAJA: The first ten amendments to the constitution, limiting the power of the government and guaranteeing our liberties and freedoms.

BEN: More specific.

ZAJA: Amendment 1: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to —

Stop. Regurgitating memorized amendments is not what I'm asking. I think we went over this pretty well.
Zaja bites her lip.

ZAJA: Without the Bill of Rights, we'd be more like... China. For instance. Here at least warrantless searches are illegal; we have free speech; citizens are protected from cruel and unusual punishment, are protected from —

HARPER: That's enough.

BEN: How would you characterize the 2010 Supreme Court decision on Citizens United?

DAVE: Ben.

ZAJA: Corporations have the same rights as people, so there's no spending limit on candidates. Which means our country is ruled by Corporations

and their lobbyists who fund candidates and command their fealty by demanding that —

HARPER: Enough! Okay? Jesus Christ, Ben! You made your point! We get it.

BEN: Wouldn't that be nice.

EXT. HARPER'S HOUSE. MORNING

Steve pulls away, leaving Harper, Dave, Jackson, and Justin watching from the curb. Nai looks out the back window of the bus and waves.
Behind their parent's backs, Jackson and Justin surreptitiously flip off Nai.

EXT. HIGHWAY. DAY

Steve travels down Highway 99, through the Central Valley.

EXT. FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA. DAY

As the sun sets, the bus makes its way through the suburbs of Flagstaff.

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." DAY

Steve pulls into a RV park.

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." DAY

Steve is now parked alongside rows of Winnebagos. Ben and Bo are out front, fixing dinner.
A small RV pulls up along side Steve. CLAIRE, a pretty teenager, comes out.

NAI: I'm going for wood.

Ben looks over to see Nai holding a small axe.

BEN: Come here.

Ben bends down into the pre-made fire pit, lights a match, turns a switch and — instant fire.

NAI: That's cheating.

BEN: Yes, it is.

Claire and Bo make eye contact, but Bo looks away.
ELLEN, Claire's Mom, exits her RV. She's about Ben's age and attractive.

ELLEN: Hello.

Ben smiles and nods.
Ellen watches Ben for a minute, as he sets up dinner for his kids.

ELLEN: You know anything about broken heaters?

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." DAY

Removed from the main RV area, on a lawn by a playground, Bodevan is moving through a series of yoga Vinyasa.

CLAIRE: Is that yoga?

Bodevan looks over to see Claire sitting on her skateboard, smoking a cigarette.

BODEVAN: Your breath, they call it "pranayama," flows with your movements, your "asana." It's supposed to connect the mind and body and fuel your "samadhi."

CLAIRE: That really works?

Bo shrugs. Claire moves closer.

CLAIRE: How old are you?

BODEVAN: 21.

CLAIRE: Really? You in college?

Bo pauses again, then nods his head yes.

CLAIRE: Where do you go?

BODEVAN: Harvard.

CLAIRE: Seriously?

Bo nods again.

CLAIRE: I love Boston.

BODEVAN: Yeah. It's... pretty cool. I mean, the Boston Massacre. The Boston Tea Party. Battle of Bunker Hill. The Siege of Boston. It has a rich history for an American city. Plus, you know, it's the home of America's first public school. Boston Latin in 1635. First subway in the U.S. In 1897. It also —

Claire laughs.

CLAIRE: That was tweaky. That was like Wikipedia. I'm Claire.

BODEVAN: Bodevan.

CLAIRE: Bodevan? What kind of name is that?

BODEVAN: My parents made it up.

CLAIRE: That's weird. Why?

BODEVAN: Our names are unique. There's just one of us in the whole world.

CLAIRE: That's weird.

Bo nods. He looks away.

INT. ELLEN'S RV. DAY

As Ben tries to diagnose the problem, Ellen trails him around her RV. He lights all the burners on her stove. They all work.

BEN: I'd have the system checked to make sure there's no LP leaks. If that's clear, have the LP pressure set, so you'll know if you have a faulty regulator.

BEN: If that's okay and you can set the pressure at 11 inches of water column, then you have to figure out how air is getting in.

BEN: See if there's air in the gas line system. But let's check if the heater lights.

Ellen laughs.

BEN: That's funny?

ELLEN: I didn't know it was actually broken.

She smiles.

ELLEN: Why don't you come over here?

For a moment, they just stare at each other. She smiles. There is a palpable sexual tension between them.

Ben walks away from her, over to the water heater.

BEN: You're a very attractive woman.

Ellen moves closer.

BEN: In another life, I'd like nothing more than to make love to you with the passion and staying power of a sex-obsessed 17-year old boy.

ELLEN: That sounds nice.

BEN: But I just lost my wife.

Her demeanor changes, transforming instantly from flirtatious to maternal.

ELLEN: Oh, my God, I am so sorry. When?

BEN: Five days ago.

The recent nature of this makes Ellen gasp. She slowly moves to Ben and hugs him.

BEN: No. I'm fine.

He gently pushes her off of him.

ELLEN: Your wife just died.

BEN: I'm fine.

ELLEN: Honey.

She reaches for him again.

BEN: I'm fine.

Ben moves away from her and lights the water heater.

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND" — POOL. NIGHT

Claire sits next to a swimming pool, her feet in the water, bobbing her head to the music coming out of her iPod.

CLAIRE: What's your favorite music?

Bo considers this.

BODEVAN: Probably Bach. Especially the Goldberg Variations. Mainly Glenn Gould's version. But I also like the Unaccompanied Cello Suites, preferably when played by Yo-Yo Ma.

This makes Karen smile.

CLAIRE: Where you from?

BODEVAN: All over. Most recently Paris. In the Marais. Near Victor Hugo's house. My family's only here for my dad's sabbatical. He's working on a book about... Dr. Spock.

CLAIRE: Star Trek's awesome.

BODEVAN: Which star?

CLAIRE: Spock. The guy with the ears. He's from Star Trek.

BODEVAN: No, he was from Connecticut, I'm pretty sure. Right after Yale, he wrote "Baby and Child Care" in 1946. One of the seminal works on childrearing.

Claire laughs.

CLAIRE: I was talking about that old TV show.

BODEVAN: Oh, yeah. Right. I know that one. It's... awesome. Where's your dad?

CLAIRE: He got remarried and moved to Florida. He's a fucking dickhead. We don't talk about him. Where's your Mom?

BODEVAN: I'm not supposed to talk about it. She works for the U.S. government.

CLAIRE: Like James Bond?

Again, Bo doesn't know this reference.

BODEVAN: I don't... know. I'm not supposed to talk about it. Due to its highly classified nature.

CLAIRE: Seriously? My Mom works for an insurance company.

Claire smiles at Bo, clearly taken with him.
He tries to hold her gaze, but can't.

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." NIGHT

Claire and Bo walk through the mostly dark RV park. She grabs his hand and pulls him toward her. Her body is so close that Bo can smell her.

She kisses him.

Bo is utterly stunned. This is his first kiss. He's slow to respond, but then, he can't stop. It's tender and sweet.

Bo's face is flushed and he's breathing rapidly. Instantly and deeply in love. He looks like he might cry.

CLAIRE: You okay?

Bo nods and she kisses him again. This time, the kiss lasts much longer.

CLAIRE: You kiss good.

BODEVAN: So do you.

They kiss again, this time their hands exploring each other's bodies. Claire finally breaks it off.

CLAIRE: Follow me. But we have to be totally quiet.

He nods and they sneak behind a few trailers.

ELLEN: It's almost midnight.

Bo and Claire turn to see Ellen, Claire's Mom, waiting up in a chair in front of her Winnebago. She smokes a cigarette and looks very pissed off.

ELLEN: I sincerely hope you two lovebirds haven't been doing what I think you've been doing.

Bo look at Claire. Then he gets down on one knee. He clears his throat.

BODEVAN: I'm considering a career in computer programming. Which can be highly lucrative. Though, of course, I'm young, so I'll keep my options open. I don't have my own house. Obviously. But I know I could provide a good home. Someday I want kids. Not now. Of course. Someday. I'm not religious, but I'm tolerant. If you are. Religious that is, not tolerant. Or... both. What's your last name?

CLAIRE: McCune.

BODEVAN: Claire McCune. Will you be my wife?

Claire stares at Bo. Then she looks at her Mom. Then they both burst out laughing.

For a moment, Bo isn't sure what to do. His face turns red. He stands. And tries to pretend like he was joking.

ELLEN: Okay, funnyman. Your dad's probably waiting up.

Bo nods.

CLAIRE: 'Night.

Bo nods again and stumbles toward Steve.

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." MORNING

Bo has made breakfast for the other kids. They're all outside, sitting on benches, eating oatmeal.

The door to Steve flies open, slamming hard against the side.

Ben strides out, naked. He stretches.

AN ELDERLY COUPLE walks by. They gawk at Ben, a completely naked man.

BEN: It's just a penis. Every man has one.

The kids stare at Ben, eating their cereal, not the slightest bit embarrassed. Like he's done this a thousand times before. Which he has. As Ben continues, a few of the kids mouth the words along with him.

BEN: We are not Puritans. We are all just animals of the earth. Is a dog embarrassed to defecate in the dirt? Of course not.

Appalled, the couple scurries away.

NAI: You get to put your penis away now.

EXT. RV "CAMPGROUND." MORNING

Ellen and Claire wave goodbye.

Bo is in the back seat, looking out the window, staring at Claire as the bus drives away. Face so close, his breath fogs the glass. He places his hand on the window. A silent goodbye.

EXT. HIGHWAY 40. DAY

Steve drives along a Highway 40, a vast desert on all sides.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

Ben grabs the PA radio.

BEN: Ladies and gentlemen, if I can have your attention please. About four hours south of here lies Camp Grant. In the late 1800s, whites arrived in this area by the thousands, depleting the food and water supplies of the indigenous people. Horrific acts of violence were committed on both sides. But as the US government wasn't doing anything about the frisky natives, people thought they'd better settle this themselves. So in the pre-dawn hours of April 30, 1871, 146 armed men surprised a camp of Apaches.

Almost all women and children, as the men were off hunting for food. Eight old men and 110 women and children were massacred in under 30 minutes. Twenty-seven children were sold into slavery in Mexico. This was the Camp Grant massacre. No one was ever prosecuted. Today, there is no physical marker locating this site, no day of remembrance.

He lets this settle in.

BEN: On a lighter note, we should be at Nana and Grandpa's in about four and half hours.

EXT. HIGHWAY 40. DAY

Now the bus exits the freeway. The terrain here is markedly different. Long gone are the mountains of evergreens. It's now the red dirt and rock formations of the Southwest desert.

EXT. ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO. DAY

Surrounded by cactus and palm trees, hundreds of rotor sprinklers SHOOT water over a vast golf course.

Steve winds past the course, which stretches into the distance, as far as the eye can see.

EXT. FRONT GATE. CORONADO RIDGE. DAY

The bus drives by the iron gate of a gated community, the sign on the gate reads, "Coronado Ridge."

Ben drives by without pausing.

BODEVAN: Wait! Why aren't we stopping at Nana and Grandpa's?

EXT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH. PARKING LOT. DUSK

Steve pulls into the parking lot of St. Jude's church and parks at the far end.

INT. STEVE — STOPPED. MORNING

It's now morning and Ben is wearing a baby blue vintage tuxedo, the shirt with enormous ruffles. He's helping the kids, as they scramble around, trying to get dressed.

Each kid is wearing their favorite piece of clothing. The twins wear pink tights and Tu-Tus, Nai has on his frayed Whale costume, Zaja is wearing what looks like some kind of military outfit, and Bo is wearing his thrift-store suit.

Rellian is still in his pajamas, staring at them all.

RELLIAN: We can't go like this.

BEN: We can do whatever we want.

RELLIAN: Then I'm not getting dressed.

BEN: Then go in your pajamas.

RELLIAN: Dad, please?! Please. Everyone is going to laugh at us.

BEN: Who cares what total strangers think? This is for Mom. She'd love what you're wearing. She'd think it was fun.

RELLIAN: We're supposed to wear black! It's a funeral.

BEN: For them it's a funeral. For us — this is her goodbye party. And we're not wearing black to a party!

EXT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH. MORNING

Outside the front doors of the church, Jack and Abigail, both visibly distraught, holding hands, stagger from a black limousine and make their way into the church.

Harper, Dave, Justin and Jackson get out of the limousine behind them and trail them into the church.

INT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH. DAY

A sea of mourners in BLACK sit a large Catholic church for the funeral Mass.

The PRIEST stands in front of the congregation, an enormous statue of Christ on the Cross above the altar at his back. As he speaks, in a warm and caring voice, incense smoke rises behind him.

PRIEST: O God, to whom mercy and forgiveness belong, hear our prayers on behalf of your servant Leslie Cash, whom you have called out of the world: and because she put her hope and trust in you, command that she be carried safely home to Heaven and come to enjoy your eternal reward. Amen.

The entire crowd repeats, "Amen."

Just then, Ben and his brightly-colored family walk to the front of the church.

They pass Harper, Dave, Justin and Jackson, who find it hard to mask their utter shock at the sight of what Ben and his kids are wearing.

Ben and the kids sit in the first row.

Jack and Abigail, also in the first row, now turn to see Ben and his family. Jack's face turns bright red, but there is nothing he can do now.

Ben nods at Jack. Jack looks away, at the priest.

The priest eyes the newcomers for a second, then continues.

PRIEST: I did not know Leslie personally. And I am poorer for it. But I understand that she was a loving mother who gave up her law practice to raise her children. Leslie loved her mother, Angela, her father, Jack, and their dogs, Harvey and Little Bear. They have told me that she also loved gardening. And classical music. Particularly Glenn Gould's version of the Goldberg Variations. And walks in the moonlight on the beach. And she loved her husband Ben and their children —

BEN: I'll take that as my cue, if I may.

Before Jack can stop him, Ben jogs to the front of the church. He stands directly in front of the priest.

BEN: First off, Leslie practiced Buddhism. Which, to her, was a philosophy and not an organized religion. In fact, Leslie abhorred organized religion, thought it the single most dangerous fairy-tale ever invented, used to strike fear and obedience into the hearts of the innocent and uninformed. She saw it not just as a source of injustice, but as a crime against humanity. To her — the only thing worse than death would have been the knowledge that her rotting flesh was to be trapped for all eternity in a box in the middle of a fucking golf course.

At this, there are audible GASPS from the congregation.

Jack pushes his way out of the pew and whispers to some USHERS IN BLACK SUITS.

BEN: Though the absurdity of being eulogized by someone who didn't even know her has exactly the kind of comedic flourish that she would have cherished.

Ben looks at his kids. They nod at him, encouraging him to continue.

BEN: If nothing else. Leslie had a sense of humor.

Ushers in black suits, guided by Jack, now inch toward the podium.

USHER: Sir? Please?

Ben ignores them. He takes a piece of paper from his jacket.

BEN: I want to read you all something. So you know what I mean. I found this after her death. It's Leslie's Will. And I quote, "In the event of her death, Leslie Abigail Cash, as a Buddhist, wishes to be cremated. Her funeral, such as it is, shall be a celebration of the life-cycle, with music and dancing. After, it is her expressed desire that her ashes shall be taken to a nondescript location, preferably public and heavily populated so as to be utterly unremarkable. At which point her ashes, promptly and unceremoniously, are to be flushed down the nearest toilet." End quote.

Ben looks up at the mourners.

BEN: Now THAT's comedy.

The ushers rush Ben. He resists, but there are too many men for Ben to fight and he is overpowered.

BEN: I'm not finished! You're not listening. She did not want this!

The ushers drag Ben toward the entrance of the church.

BEN: Let go of me! This is against her wishes! She was my wife!

Bo gathers the kids and they follow as their father is dragged — fighting — out of the church.

EXT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH. DAY

Ben sits on a bench next to the front doors of the church. The children, despondent and dazed, sit farther off, on a grassy knoll.

The church doors open and PALLBEARERS, followed by Jack and Abigail; Harper, Dave and their kids, and various other RELATIVES, accompany the casket to the waiting Hearse.

The CONGREGATION moves to their cars, giving the family their privacy.

Jack looks up to find Ben, not three feet away.

JACK: You are the worst thing that has ever happened to my family.

The kids straggle up.

BEN: Jack, you remember your grandchildren.

Only now does Jack see the kids. In an instant, he softens, bending down to embrace his grandchildren.

JACK: Come here, guys. I've missed you all so much. Come here.

He and Abigail wade into the kids. Abigail looks dazed. Or severely medicated.

ABIGAIL: It's so nice to all be together.

JACK: We'll take the children to the ceremony. And see you back at the house after.

BEN: They're my kids. They're staying with me.

Jack stares at Ben for a moment. Then he addresses his grandchildren.

JACK: Children. I'm sorry it's turned out this way. But your father has demonstrated that he is unfit to attend the funeral.

BEN: I won't allow you to bury her.

JACK: You follow us. I will have you arrested.

Ben laughs.

JACK: Who do you think the local police are going to listen to? A long-standing member of this community? Or a hippie. Dressed like a clown.

Jack faces Ben for a moment. Then he takes Abigail by the arm and they move to their limousine.

BEN: I'm not a hippie.

The kids watch as their grandparent's limousine disappears into the distance.

BEN: Everyone back on Steve! Let's go!

VESPYR: Where are we going?

BEN: We're going to stop the funeral.

RELLIAN: He said no. Dad!

But Ben's already on the bus, the engine running.

EXT. CEMETERY. DAY

The long line of black cars funnel into the rolling hills of a cemetery.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

Ben is keeping a fair distance, but still following the funeral procession of black cars.

BODEVAN: We can't go. Dad!

VESPYR: Listen to us!

NAI: Why can't we go to Mom's funeral?

ZAJA: Because of dad.

NAI: Because of his speech?

ZAJA: Yes.

BEN: Everyone shut up! And sit the fuck down! I want silence. SILENCE!

KIELYR BODEVAN: No! Dad, stop Steve! Dad! You heard grandpa! He'll have us arrested if we show up.

BEN: They will not stop us from saving Mom!

KIELYR VESPYR: Let's go home. Let's just go Dad! Abort the mission! home!

ZAJA: Yeah, abort mission!

BEN: We are rescuing Mom!

BODEVAN: Mom is dead! She's dead! Okay?! This is not what she would have wanted you to do!

BEN: They have no right! Bo now yells.

BODEVAN: I don't want to lose you!

This stops Ben. He looks at Bo.

BODEVAN: We can't lose you too.

Ben finally hears his son.
And it breaks his heart.

EXT. HIGHWAY RV "CAMPGROUND." DAY/EVE

Ben sits outside the bus, playing his guitar in front of a small fire.
Zaja tries to sneak on the bus.

BEN: Hey, get your flute. Let's play.

Zaja stares at him; she seems to be hiding something behind her back.

BEN: What have you got there?

She opens her hands revealing a dead lizard.

ZAJA: I have work to do.

Zaja climbs on the bus.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET NEAR "CAMPGROUND." NIGHT

A quiet street, lit by a long line of street lamps. Rell is throwing rocks at one of them.

Bo walks out of the darkness.

BODEVAN: It's okay to be sad about Mom.

Rell just keeps flinging rocks at the light.

RELLIAN: She wanted to be flushed down the toilet.

BODEVAN: Mom was sicker than any of us knew.

RELLIAN: Dad MADE her crazy. That's why she killed herself. She wanted to leave. She didn't want to live in the forest anymore. Dad is dangerous.

Bo laughs.

RELLIAN: Mom had psychotic episodes. She had hallucinations. Of smashing our heads in. With rocks. I heard them talking about it.

Bo stares at his brother, absorbing this new information.

RELLIAN: You think you know everything. You think our lives are so great. You think Dad is perfect! Nana and Grandpa's lives. They're much better.

Rell turns and races back toward the RV Camp.

EXT. HIGHWAY RV "CAMPGROUND." NIGHT

Ben walks out of the bus and finds Bo, reading.

BEN: You want to play some music?

Bo opens his backpack and hands Ben his stack of college acceptance letters. Ben sits in front of the fire. He reads the letters. After he finishes, there's a long moment of silence.

BEN: Well done.

BODEVAN: Thanks.

BEN: Very impressive.

BODEVAN: I guess.

Ben passes the letters back to Bo.

BEN: All this time, you've been deceiving me.

BODEVAN: What? No.

BEN: I allowed you to go to the library and you were sneaking around behind my back, taking the SATs, contacting and applying to universities.

BODEVAN: Not like that.

BEN: We're not an accredited home-school, but secretly, you filled out these applications, you got your work approved, you managed to create acceptable transcripts.

BODEVAN: No.

BEN: All without my knowledge or approval. I don't know what's more impressive. The fact that you got into all these schools. Or that for months, you were lying directly to my face!

BODEVAN: It was Mom.

Ben is silent. This is clearly a surprise.

BODEVAN: She helped me. With everything. We did it together. I just want to go to college.

BEN: You speak four languages. High math! Theoretical physics! What are they going to teach you there?

BODEVAN: I know nothing.

Ben stares at his son.

BODEVAN: Mom understood! She knew! We're freaks. You've made us freaks. Unless it came out of a book. I don't know anything about ANYTHING!

Bo storms into the bus.
Ben sits there for a second, at a loss.

NAI: Dad?

Ben looks up to see Nai, naked.

BEN: Put on some clothes, buddy.

Nai shakes his head no. He holds a piece of paper and reads.

NAI: "Don't try and get me. This is real this time. — Rellian."

INT. STEVE — MOVING. SUBURBAN STREET. NIGHT

All the kids are standing, peering out the windows as they drive Steve down a city street.

BEN: He couldn't have got very far.

NAI: Is he going to die?

BEN: No, buddy.

ZAJA: According to recent FBI statistics, in exurban and suburban semi-dense residential areas, there was an average of 1,242 incidences of violent crime, murder, forcible rape, aggravated assault —

BEN: Zaj!

ZAJA: I'm just saying, he COULD die. Statistically speaking.

BEN: He'll be fine. Rell is confused. We're all confused. The world is a confusing place. We just have to find him.

BODEVAN: I know where he went.

Everyone turns to look at Bo.

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Ben jumps off the bus and runs up to the front door of Jack and Abigail's house, followed by Bo, Vespyr, and Kielyr.

BEN: Bo, make sure everyone stays on Steve!

Bo pushes the twins back toward Steve.

INT. FOYER. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Ben pushes his way into the house, Abigail right behind him.

ABIGAIL: Ben, no. No!

Abigail steps in front of him, physically stopping him. Behind them, all over the walls, are mounted game trophies: deer, wild boar, pheasants.

BEN: Where is he?

Abigail pauses, seeing the anxiety on Ben's face.

BEN: He's my son.

Abigail finally nods her head.

ABIGAIL: Follow me.

And she leads him down a hallway.

INT. GAME SIMULATOR ROOM. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Ben follows Abigail into the dark, game simulator room. On one entire wall is a large projected image: a field, blue sky, trees in the background.

Rellian holds a shotgun, bright orange cords running from the stock to the central console of this Marksman ST-2 Indoor Shooting Simulator. On the screen, a grouse flies up and Rellian fires.

BEN: Okay. Rell. Get your things.

JACK: One second there.

Rellian doesn't move.

BEN: Rell, come on.

JACK: I said, one second.

Ben ignores Jack and speaks directly to Rellian.

BEN: Rell, look at me. I understand that you're angry for making us go to the church with us dressed like that. And I apologize. But sometimes you have to do things that you —

Jack turns on the lights.

JACK: Rellian has something to say.

BEN: — that you don't want to do, that you do because it's what someone —

RELLIAN: You killed Mom!

Ben pauses.

RELLIAN: I heard you. I heard you fighting about where we live! Mom wanted to leave! I heard.

BEN: Mom and I made certain decisions about how —

RELLIAN: You're the worst dad in the whole world! I want to live here, with Nana and Grandpa!

Rell is so angry that his face is turning red.

BEN: Well, that's not possible.

RELLIAN: Fuck you. I hate you! I fucking hate you!

Rellian bolts out of the room, followed by Abigail, leaving Ben and Jack alone. Ben turns, calling after Rell.

BEN: Come back here right now!

Not five feet from Ben's head, an arrow THUDS into the wall.
Ben jumps.

BEN: Jesus!

He stares at the arrow, buried deep in the wall.

BEN: What the fuck.

He turns to see Jack lower Rellian's bow.

BEN: That almost hit me.

Jack examines the bow, then points to the various mounted game around the room.

JACK: If I had wanted to hit you, I would have hit you.

Jack pours himself a drink, but doesn't offer one to Ben.

JACK: Isolated from the world. No friends their own age. It will have a profoundly deleterious impact on them. For the rest of their lives.

BEN: You just shot a fucking arrow at me!

Jack sips his drink.

JACK: You told us that they were in school.

BEN: Leslie and I are their teachers. Were. Their teachers.

JACK: You teach them to steal?

BEN: Of course not.

JACK: "Mission: Free the Food."

BEN: That was part of their training.

JACK: So you're "training" them to steal.

BEN: Their mother just died. They were in shock. They were devastated. They needed something to distract them. It was for Noam Chomsky Day.

JACK: Noam Chomsky Day. Right. That's when you gave the children real weapons.

BEN: Tell Rell that we're going. Right now.

JACK: How did he break his hand?

Ben pauses.

BEN: He fell. And it's not broken.

JACK: Climbing a rock face. In the rain.

BEN: It was an accident. And it wasn't raining.

JACK: He has bruises all over his body.

BEN: They're scratches. It's nothing.

JACK: It's child abuse. Even if they make it through whatever it is you're doing to them, they'll be completely unable to survive as adults, totally unprepared for the real world.

BEN: And I think the opposite is true. Are you going to get him or do I have to?

JACK: Rellian is legally old enough to choose. Perhaps you didn't know that. But I intend to honor his wishes.

Jack hands Ben a business card.

JACK: My lawyer's card. Abby and I have decided to file for the custody of the children. I know you don't have a phone. But I strongly suggest you call him immediately so we're not forced to issue a warrant for your arrest.

Ben rips the card in half.

BEN: He is my son. I'm not leaving without him.

Jack picks up the phone and dials.

JACK: Who's this, please?

(pause)

Hello, Bill. It's Jack Bertrang, up in Coronado. Listen, I think I just saw someone prowling around outside the house. Could you send a car over right away?

(pause)

Thank you very much.

Jack replaces the phone and stares at Ben.

JACK: Perhaps you'd care to explain Rellian's injuries to the police. I'm not sure I could.

INT. STEVE — STOPPED/MOVING. NIGHT

Ben starts the bus and peels it out of the gravel parking lot.

BODEVAN: Where's Rell?

VESPYR: Why are we leaving without Rell?

Ben says nothing, barreling down the driveway.

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT

In the darkness, Ben and the kids, lie in the brush, surveilling their grandparent's home.

Ben — looking through binoculars — watches as Jack shakes hands with a POLICE OFFICER in the driveway. The officer gets in his squad car, drives down the gravel driveway, and disappears.

Ben passes the binoculars to Vespyr.

BEN: Prisoner located. Second floor. Middle window over the garage.

Vespyr peers through the binoculars.

VESPYR: Target locked.

BEN: Mission is a go.

Bo slaps Vesp on the shoulder.

ZAJA: Don't fall.

VESPYR: Yeah. Thanks.

ZAJA: You'll fracture your cranium. Or the impact will cause an acute subdural hematoma. Or your vertebra could pop out off your back in an axial compression fracture —

BEN: Zaj.

KIELYR: Bring him home, Vesp.

Vespyr jumps up.

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Vespyr stares at a dark wall of Jack and Abigail's house. It's about a twenty foot climb straight up to the roof.

She bolts — full speed — toward the wall.

She plants a foot on a water spout, grabs a tree branch, and — in one swift motion — swings herself up to the lip and flips onto the roof.

She kneels in the dark, scanning. Planning.

Like a trapeze artist, nimble and moving swiftly, Vespyr shimmies across a long, narrow section of the roof.

She leaps, landing in a crouch on a flat section of the roof and pauses, again analyzing her trajectory.

She pounces, gripping a drain pipe and flings herself upward. It's steep, it's slow going, but she's strong.

Now at the very top of the house, fifty feet off the ground, she shuffles over a cupola and drops onto another section of the roof.

She hovers over a second story window, the light on, now only 5 feet away.

She turns and gripping a tile, she lowers herself.

CRACK.

The tile snaps and — in an instant — Vespyr tumbles down the roof.

She bumps and somersaults, head over heels, her hands grasping at the roof as she falls, but there's nothing to hold.

And she flips over the edge...

Dropping twenty feet...

Until her body slams — with a sickening thud — against an SUV parked in the gravel driveway. She rolls off, a rag doll, and flops to the driveway.

NAI: Vesp!

Everyone leaps up and races to her.

The lights of the parking perimeter FLASH on.

INT. AMBULANCE — MOVING. NIGHT

In the back of an ambulance, Ben kneels next to Vespyr, who lies on a gurney.

Her eyes are closed and an oxygen mask is on her face.

An EMT PARAMEDIC monitors her vitals.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR. HOSPITAL. NIGHT

Ben runs, helpless, next to the EMTs as they race Vespyr on the gurney down the hallway.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR. HOSPITAL. NIGHT

Ben paces the hallways.
The kids sleep on hallway benches and on the floor.

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR. HOSPITAL. NIGHT

It's the middle of the night. The corridor is now dimly lit and empty.
Ben sits against a wall on the floor.
A DOCTOR comes out of Vespyr's room and Ben leaps up to meet him.

DOCTOR: She has a decent concussion. But we did a CAT scan and there's absolutely no damage to the brain. A simple fracture across the tibia and fibula on her left leg. She'll need a neckbrace and a cast. But she's fine.

Ben can't help but cry, but he's doing everything he can to pretend like he's not.

DOCTOR: I'd like to show you something.

INT. X-RAY ROOM. HOSPITAL. NIGHT

The doctor clicks on a light on a wall-mounted light box and illuminates an X-Ray. He touches it.

DOCTOR: Top vertebrae. That slight discoloration? That's a bruise. What was she doing on a roof?

BEN: Just... playing.

DOCTOR: Exactly how far did she fall?

BEN: Twenty feet or so.

Ben leans in. An infinitesimal gray line, about the width of a hair and no longer than a finger nail, is barely perceptible across the top vertebrae.

DOCTOR: She a gymnast?

Ben shakes his head no.

DOCTOR: But she plays a lot of sports.

Ben shakes his head no again.

DOCTOR: Hmm. For a girl her age, she's unusually strong. Physically. It's... remarkable.

The doctor points to the bruise on the X-ray.

DOCTOR: We have seven vertebrae in the neck. A break in any of the first four, a tear to the spinal cord, I'm talking even a millimeter more than what happened here — a millimeter. Your daughter would be dead. You are a very lucky man.

INT. VESPYR'S HOSPITAL ROOM. HOSPITAL. NIGHT

In the dark room, Ben sits next to a sleeping Vespyr, holding her hand. He watches the EKG monitor. Watches as her heart beat bounces up and down, up and down.

INT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY

Jack holds open the front door — Abigail helps Vespyr, on crutches and in a neck-brace, into the foyer.

They are followed in by the rest of the kids.

And then finally, by Ben, carrying luggage.

EXT. LAWN. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY

On the massive grass lawn in the back of their grandparent's house, Ben watches as his kids run Jack through a serious full-body, hardcore functional training routine: they're all shouting orders at him, teaching him how to move from lunges to Burpies into Plank.

JACK: Why is this called a Burpie? Am I supposed to burp?

Nai finds this hilarious.

NAI: No! Because it makes you want to vomit! If you do them enough.

RELLIAN: No burping!

BODEVAN: No stopping!

VESPYR: KIELYR No vomiting allowed! No throwing up!

All the kids are laughing; everyone is having a great time with their grandfather.
Abigail appears in front of Ben, blocking his view.

INT. GARAGE. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY

The enormous garage is filled with all kinds of athletic equipment and ephemera: his-and-her bicycles, golf trophies, golf carts.

Abigail is on the floor of the garage, fishing around in a cardboard box. She passes a photograph to Ben.

It is a photograph of Leslie at her High School Prom. She has a bleached blonde streak in her hair, frosted eyeliner, and both her dress and her date's tuxedo are the height of 1980s fashion.

ABIGAIL: That boy, what was his name? Dean? Derek?

BEN: Dirk. Dirk Modzelewski.

ABIGAIL: Lord, you're right. He was as dumb as paint. Cute, though. I think she was just with him for the sex.

Ben looks at Abigail, not sure whether or not to laugh.
Abigail smiles and they both crack up.

ABIGAIL: There's all kinds of stuff in here. Take what you want.

Ben reaches into the box and pulls out another photograph. This one is of Leslie at her Law School Graduation.

ABIGAIL: And there's also this.

Abigail passes over a handwritten letter.

ABIGAIL: Right before you called about getting her treatment, she sent me two letters. No return address. I wanted you to see. Read here.

Abigail passes over another letter and points to a paragraph.

BEN: (reading) "You don't need to come get me anymore. Burn the other letter. What Ben and I have created here may be unique in all of human existence. We've created a paradise out of Plato's Republic. Our children shall be Philosopher Kings. It makes me so indescribably happy. I'm going to get better out here. I know I will. Because we are defined by our actions, not our words."

Ben stares at the letter.

INT. MEDIA ROOM. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT

Ben walks into a media screening room. All the children are watching television on a huge screen.

Ben stares at his kids for a moment.

BEN: Remember the night when we slept on the glacier. The full moon. Bright like it was daytime. Mom made rabbit stew. With the wild ramps that Zaj collected.

Rell turns up the volume on the television. Ben speaks over it.

BEN: That was the spring when we found those black bear cubs. Someone shot their mother. And Mom wanted to keep them. But we let them go.

Rell turns the volume up again. It's now blaring.

BEN: We gave you that. At least.

Ben nods. And he then leaves the room.

INT. LIVING ROOM. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING

Jack and Abigail sit on a sofa in their living room, right outside of Jack's office. Jack kisses Abigail's hand.

EXT. LAWN. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING

The kids sit in a circle on the lawn, staring at Ben. They look stunned.

NAI: Like forever?

BEN: Nothing's forever.

ZAJA: But like, not going home.

BEN: Yes. Like not going home.

KIELYR: Dad.

NAI: You don't love us anymore?

BEN: Of course I love you.

NAI: Then why are you doing this?

BEN: BECAUSE I love you.

The kids try to comprehend what they've just been told.

NAI: No.

VESPYR: But we want to live with you.

Ben stares at his children. The moment stretches.

BEN: I almost got you killed.

VESPYR: The tile just popped out.

Ben shakes his head no.

BEN: You don't understand.

VESPYR: Fine. Then explain. Explain.

NAI: Use your words.

Ben smiles. Wrestling with his guilt and culpability renders Ben mute for perhaps the first time in his life. He tries to articulate his thoughts. He fails.

BODEVAN: Dad.

Ben looks up at Bo. He looks so lost.

BEN: Yeah.

BODEVAN: You okay?

Ben stares. Almost like he's talking to himself.

BEN: Mom was so sick. I knew it. I did. I knew. I should have...

He doesn't finish his sentence.

BODEVAN: Mom was chemically imbalanced.

BEN: I thought. It would help her. I really thought she'd get better there.

BODEVAN: It's not your fault.

BEN: It was too much. Living in the woods. For that long.

NAI: I don't want to live here.

VESPYR: This house is a vulgar display of wealth.

KIELYR: And an unethical use of space.

NAI: Why can't we just stay with you?

Ben focuses on his kids.

BEN: If you do. I'm going to get one of you killed.

BODEVAN: This can't be the only choice. Dad. Dad?

Ben is silent.

NAI: Dad!

Ben doesn't seem to hear them. His eyes are dead. He looks so old, suddenly.
The kids look at each other, unsure how to proceed.

INT. FOYER. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY

Ben ambles, disorientated, into the hallway.
Abigail stands as soon as she sees him.
Ben appears suspended, just sort of shuffling in place; he has no idea where to go next.
Abigail rushes over and pulls him into a hug. She pats the back of his head, soothing him like he's a child.
Jack doesn't move. He stares down at the floor, giving them some space, trying to be as respectful as possible.

INT. GAME SIMULATOR ROOM. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. NIGHT

The room is dark and Rellian, in his pajamas, a shotgun in his hands, stands next to Jack. On the wall in front of them is another projected outdoor scene: four ducks fly over a pond.
Rellian fires and hits two ducks. Immediately after he fires, analysis appears on the screen: hit position, gun swing, changing flight velocity, entry of target trajectory.

JACK: Look at that! We'll make a marksman of you yet.

RELLIAN: I got two!

Rellian beams.

JACK: See how when you stop your swing, you're no longer on the target?
Okay, hold on.

Jack presses a button on the console and now the simulator shows the replay in slow motion.

JACK: Good entry point on the trajectory. But right there. Can you tell me why you missed?

Rellian reads the display.

RELLIAN: Looks like I was slow maybe?

JACK: Correct, it's timing, but see there? Says your swing path was off. Next time...

Jack adjusts Rellian's barrel.

JACK: Next time come in on a path more like that. Okay. Ready?

Rellian smiles and nods as Jack hits a button on the console.

RELLIAN: When are we going to move my mom's body?

JACK: Move it where?

RELLIAN: I mean, so she can be cremated.

JACK: Oh. We're not doing that.

This confuses Rell.

RELLIAN: No. But it was in her Will.

JACK: I understand. But we're not burning her body. Pay attention now.

Rell drops his barrel, suddenly so agitated that the volume of his voice betrays him.

RELLIAN: Grandpa? We have to cremate her! She had really specific instructions. About what she wanted.

JACK: Your mother had no idea what she wanted. Watch the screen. You just missed the first round.

Rellian's face flushes red.

RELLIAN: No! It was super important to her! She wanted music and —

JACK: Do not raise your voice to me, young man.

Rell stares at his grandfather.

RELLIAN: Can we please have a discourse?

Jack smiles.

JACK: This is not up for discussion.

RELLIAN: Don't I at least get my chance to argue my —

JACK: I'm a grown-up. You're a child. I make decisions that you won't understand. One day you will. No one said it's fair. That is life. It's a vital lesson, worth learning right now. It's waste a time to fight it.

You will not win. Is that understood?

Rell continues to stare at Jack. Then he nods.
Jack musses up Rellian's hair.

JACK: Good boy. I'm getting some ice cream, you want some ice cream? We have Cherry Garcia and coffee, if Nana didn't polish it off.

Jack flips the light on and ambles toward the kitchen

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING

Ben is unpacking Steve, piling some of the kid's things onto the gravel driveway.

INT. GAME ROOM. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. MORNING

Bo closes the door to the game room.

BODEVAN: Okay. We're safe.

He nods at Zaja.

ZAJA: The "Widowhood Effect." And here, from an article I read in The Economist or The Lancet, I can't remember which, but I'm quoting a recent study by The Harvard School of Public Health: in a long-term relationship or marriage, after the death of a partner, men are 18% more likely to die. Additionally, more recent studies indicate that there's a 66% increased chance of dying during the first 3 months and in men under 59, standardized mortality rates were about 90 times the average in the FIRST WEEK.

RELLIAN: I'm leaving.

Rell marches toward the door.

VESPYR: "Mission: Rescue Dad and Mom." First objective. We provide Dad with a clear goal and legitimate closure. Secondary objective. We rescue Mom's body.

Rell turns to look at his brothers and sisters.

ZAJA: Fuck Nana and Grandpa.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY

Ben stacks a pile of the kid's clothes in Jack's office.

JACK: You know where you headed?

Ben shakes his head no.

JACK: How will I contact you?

BEN: I'll call you in a couple of days. I still need to ship you all their stuff.

On Jack's desk is a framed picture of Leslie. The same one that Ben keeps above the dashboard on Steve.

It catches Ben's eye. He stares at it.

Jack follows his gaze.

Both men stare at the photo for a moment.

They look at each other. Leslie's father, Leslie's husband. Neither sure how to acknowledge their profound mutual love for her.

They just nod.

Finally, Jack extends his hand and they shake.

BEN: Zaja likes to collect things. Dead things. She's kind of an amateur taxidermist.

JACK: Okay.

BEN: Nai doesn't like to wear clothes.

Jack nods.

BEN: Vespyr and Kielyr like to speak in Esperanto.

JACK: I understand.

BEN: Bo wants to go to college. He got in everywhere. I don't know how we can afford it exactly, but —

JACK: Ben. I'll take care of it. We'll take good care of them. There's nothing to worry about. I promise. You're doing the right thing.

Ben nods his head.

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY

Ben walks across the gravel to Steve.

EXT./INT. STEVE — STOPPED. DAY

He climbs up and closes the doors.

He looks around. Without the kids, the bus is so empty.

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOUSE. DAY

He pulls Steve out of the gravel parking lot.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

Now on the highway, far from civilization, Ben bursts into tears. All the pain, the grief, the intense sadness of Leslie's death and from leaving his children — it all finally just pours out.

INT. GAS STATION. NEW MEXICO. DAY

In a roadside gas station convenience store, Ben stacks bottles of water on the counter.

Behind the ATTENDANT, something on the wall of items for sale catches his eye.

INT. BATHROOM. GAS STATION. NEW MEXICO. DAY

In the dingy gas station bathroom, Ben stands in front of a broken mirror, a newly bought hair clipper in his hand.

He slowly, methodically, buzzes off his beard.

EXT. HIGHWAY. DUSK

As the sun sets, Steve is now but a small dot moving slowly through the desert.

EXT. CAMP. NIGHT

Off the highway, in front of the parked bus, Ben stares into a small fire, shadows flitting across this face.

RELLIAN: You shaved your face.

Ben looks up to see Rellian standing not 5 feet away.

RELLIAN: I don't hate you.

For a second, Ben's not sure whether or not he's hallucinating.

RELLIAN: I just wish you'd helped Mom.

Then Ben sees the rest of his kids. Bo, Vespyr, Kielyr, Zaja, and a completely naked Nai walk down off the bus.

Rellian hugs his dad.

BEN: Me too.

RELLIAN: We want to complete the mission.

KIELYR: We want to save Mom.

BEN: There is no mission.

ZAJA: "Mission: Rescue Mommy."

VESPYR: Mom wanted to be cremated.

RELLIAN: We want to honor her wishes.

NAI: And flush her down the toilet.

Ben looks up at his kids.

BEN: I'm not ever going to put you in danger again.

RELLIAN: "If you assume that there is no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things, then there is a possibility that you can contribute to making a better world."

Ben smiles.

BEN: Noam Chomsky.

BODEVAN: Please.

EXT. CEMETERY. NIGHT

Steve pulls into a dark cemetery.

EXT. CEMETERY. NIGHT

The family exits Steve and searches, silently, through the dark cemetery. They all carry flashlights and lanterns, casting long shadows, creeping across a moon-lit landscape.

VESPYR: Dad!

They all move toward Vespyr's voice, gathering around a freshly covered grave. Zaja reads the gravestone.

ZAJA: "Leslie Abigail Cash. April 23, 1967 — July 15, 2014. May God Bless her Soul for All Eternity."

Nai unzips the duffel bag, revealing spades, garden trowels, climbing rope.

NAI: Otherwise she has to lie under that bullshit forever.

Ben and the kids thrust shovels into the freshly laid grass patches above the grave and dig.

SERIES OF SHOTS

- Nai and Zaja stand in the grave, shoveling dirt.
- Climbing rope tied to the side handles of the casket, held by Bo and Rellian, Ben yanks the casket from the grave and slides it onto the grass.
- The family, now covered in dirt, pauses, catching their breath, staring at the freshly dug casket.

ZAJA: Mommy's in here.

For a moment, they all forget where they are and what they're doing. And touch the casket, imagining their mother inside.

EXT. CEMETERY PARKING LOT. NIGHT

Struggling through the parking lot under its weight — silent pallbearers — they carry their mother's casket to the bus.

EXT. CEMETERY PARKING LOT. NIGHT

Steve pulls out of the cemetery parking lot.

EXT. HIGHWAY. NIGHT

Steve drives through the night.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

Everyone is awake as the bus travels down the freeway.

All the children surround the open casket, resting in the center of the bus, and stare at —

Leslie's lifeless face, so white it's almost translucent.

They place flowers in her hair, on her chest, around her neck.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

Inside the small bathroom on the bus, Bo switches on the hair clipper. He slowly runs it across his scalp, lopping off his long hair.

He stares at himself in the mirror, his head now buzzed.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. DAY

Bo comes out of the bathroom.

The kids look at their brother, but say nothing.

INT. STEVE — MOVING. NIGHT

Ben drives through the night. He looks in the rearview mirror. All the kids, apart from Bo, are now finally asleep.

Bo and Ben look at each other.

Ben rubs his chin. No hair.

Bo rubs the top of this head. No hair.

Bo smiles at his dad and Ben smiles back.

EXT. BEACH CLIFFS. MORNING

Steve is parked on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean as dawn breaks over the horizon. This early, the sky is an electric blue; the clouds, striations of yellow and orange.

Leslie's body, tightly wrapped in a clean white sheet, lies on top of about a cord of dry firewood and newspaper, creating a massive funeral pyre.

Ben nods at Nai.

As each kid approaches the pyre, they place a memento on their mother's body: notes, flowers, etc.

NAI: Mommy. I love you. I love your hair.

I love your smell. I love your face. I love your belly button. I love your sparkly shirt. I love how you cook. I think... that's about it.

Ben nods at Zaja.

ZAJA: You will always be my mommy. And I will never forget you and I will remember you every second of every day of my life. And when you burn up, only calcium, potassium, magnesium and trace element compounds will remain. And as your ashes mix with water and decomposing plants, you will be carbonates and oxides. You will be liming agents, raising pH, and neutralize acid in the earth and you'll make the soil happy. So things can grow. And I love you forever.

Ben nods at Vespyr and Kielyr. They step forward, reading from a piece of paper.

KIELYR: "I think again over my small adventures. My fears. Those small ones that seemed so big. For all the vital things. I had to get and reach."

VESPYR: "And yet there is only one great thing. The only thing. To live to see the great day that dawns. And the light that fills the world."

Ben gestures and Bo steps forward.

BODEVAN: I had you as my mom. For 18 years. I hope you're happy now. I hope you're laughing. We're going to be okay. As a family. Everything's going to be okay. Oh. And I sort of got into a bunch of colleges.

Ben steps forward.

BEN: Hey, Slug. It's me. I'm sorry. That I didn't know what to do. I'm sorry if I made things worse. You're my best friend.

Ben smiles at Rellian.

Rellian lights a wooden match and passes lit matches to the kids. Together, all the children reach up and light the pyre.

The newspaper and kindling catches, pops and crackles, engulfing Leslie's body in flames.

RELLIAN: This was Mom's favorite song.

Rellian nods at Kielyr, who sings "Sweet Child of Mine," by Guns 'N Roses.

After the first verse, Bo joins on guitar, then Rell, on his cajon, then Vespyr harmonizes, then Zaja plays her tambourine and Nai comes in with his harmonica.

As the music builds — black smoke billows above them all — and now everyone, including Ben, is dancing and rocking out, singing and crying and laughing.

And it's a party.

INT. SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. DAY

Ben and the kids ride the people-movers down the terminal.

INT. BATHROOM. SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. DAY

The entire family — Ben, Bo, Rellian, Vespyr and Kielyr, Zaja, and Nai — are crowded into a small toilet stall.

Ben pulls a paper bag out of his backpack. He opens it wide enough for the ashes inside to be visible.

Then he pours.

They all stare at Leslie's ashes in the toilet bowl.

There is a moment of silence.

And then, they all just start laughing.

NAI: Bye, Mommy.

And Nai flushes the toilet.

INT. SEATTLE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. DAY

At the ticket gate, all the kids hug Bo.

NAI: Why are you going to the Philippines?

Bo shrugs.

BODEVAN: I just put my finger on a map.

ZAJA: The Moro Islamic Liberation Front kidnapped an American last year.

BEN: He'll be fine.

ZAJA: 'Cause if they kidnap you...

She looks at Ben and then stops.

ZAJA: Forget it.

BEN: Go ahead. Say it. You know you want to.

ZAJA: If they kidnap you, you could die.

BODEVAN: Then I better watch out for them.

Ben hugs his son tightly.

BEN: When you have sex with a woman, be gentle and listen to her.

BEN: Treat her with respect and dignity, even if you don't love her.

BODEVAN: I know.

BEN: Always tell the truth. And always take the high road.

BODEVAN: I know.

BEN: Live each day like it could be your last. You drink it in, be adventurous, be bold, but savor it — it goes fast.

BODEVAN: I know.

Ben stares at his son.

BEN: Don't die.

BODEVAN: I won't.

Ben nods. Then he and the kids walk away.
After a moment, Nai runs back and hugs his brother's knee.

BODEVAN: Power to the people.

NAI: Stick it to the man.

Nai runs back and joins his family on the people-mover.

EXT. GAS STATION CONVENIENCE STORE. WASHINGTON. DAY

At a roadside gas station payphone, Rellian speaks to Jack, who sits in his home office.

RELLIAN: It's what I want. It's what we all want. Swear you won't try to stop him.

JACK: I won't stop him.

Rell nods.

JACK: Put your dad on the phone, will you?

Rellian holds out the phone for Ben, just now coming out of the store, and Ben takes the receiver.

JACK: I don't know if I can ever forgive you for what you have done with Leslie.

Ben nods.

JACK: Having said that. I promised to honor Rellian's wishes. And I will.

BEN: Thank you.

JACK: Are you planning on hiding from us now?

BEN: That was not the plan, no.

JACK: Abby and I... we'd like to see the kids more. What would you say to Thanksgiving?

BEN: We'll see you in November.

JACK: Okay.

BEN: Okay.

Ben hangs up the receiver as the other kids come out of the gas station convenience store, carrying some fruit.

BEN: You hungry?

RELLIAN: Okay.

Ben hands him an apple and they all walk back to Steve.

EXT. DIRT ROAD. MORNING

A yellow school bus, passing through farm land in Western Oregon, kicks up dust on a dirt road.

EXT. YARD. DAY

Vespyr and Kielyr run through a large vegetable garden — in raised-beds, lines of lettuce, broccoli, cabbage, kale, and Swiss chard are neatly organized in perfectly-spaced rows.

They run toward Steve — propped up and without wheels — sitting at the edge of the garden.

INT. STEVE. DAY

The interior of Steve has been completely gutted and transformed into a gigantic chicken coop. Dozens of CHICKENS cluck when Vespyr and Kielyr enter the bus.

VESPYR: Hey, guys.

The girls pour feed into 12-gallon, galvanized steel poultry feeders.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

Vespyr and Kielyr walk into the kitchen of a funky house: the furniture appears second hand, the walls are all painted different colors, kid's drawings cover the walls.

The place is also cluttered with string and tape, hanging found objects creating bizarre sculptures; bicycles, skateboards, musical instruments, and toys cover every surface.

VESPYR: We have to buy more feed.

KIELYR: We only have enough for another two days or so.

The twins pass Ben and sit at the breakfast room table. They fix themselves bowls of cereal and immediately fall into reading their books.

BEN: You both finish the "Madame Bovary" book report?

KIELYR: Plus Mr. Grant let us do "The Tin Drum" for extra credit.

VESPYR: That shit is intense.

Now Rell, Zaja, and Nai come in, each carrying a basket of freshly picked vegetables: broccoli, mesclun, romaine lettuce, peas, green beans, and squash.

BEN: Bus is here in 10.

They put the vegetable baskets on the counter — next to the their school backpacks — and sit down to eat breakfast. They also all read or work on their homework.

Ben takes the lunch he's made for his five kids — peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and apples — and places them into paper bags.

He sets them out on the counter, each bag identified with their name. He stares at the lunch bags for a moment.

Then he breaks some broccoli into stalks and places a piece in each bag.

Ben sits down next to his kids, watching them eat.

Without looking up from his book, Rellian pours cereal and milk into a bowl and passes it over to his dad.

Ben smiles.

And then — for an extended period of time — they all just continue to eat in silence.

THE END.

Matt Ross
Captain Fantastic
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